**Title of the article**: Flood of COVID-19 related fake publications - reputed journals should not drown.

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**Flood of COVID-19 related fake publications - reputed journals should not drown.**

**Abstract**

At present the whole world is going through tough times with respect to the physical, mental and financial health .The onset of severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 (SARS-CoV2) and the corona virus disease (COVID) since the end of 2019 has taken all of us by surprise. No drug or vaccine has given satisfactory results as of now. It is a race between time and researchers working on its solution.

Sadly, all these crucial efforts are being affected and at times misguided and derailed by publication of fake articles by sham researchers and the mismanagement by authentic and predatory journals. Problem is that genuine and good quality articles are lost in the crowd.

It is the need of the hour to bring in stricter norms and to follow due diligence before allowing articles in public domain. At the same time, it has become life saving to separate wheat from the chaff so that the genuine studies of first-hand experience of handling and management of corona patients and authentic research does not drown in this flood of COVID 19 fake publications.

**Keywords**

COVID 19; Corona; research; articles; retraction; fake

**Article**

The onset of severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 (SARS-CoV2) and the corona virus disease (COVID) since the end of 2019 has taken the world and the medical fraternity with surprise [1].

Till the writing of this commentary no drug or vaccine has been able to prove its mettle as a cure or protective elixir with an acceptable and reproducible success rate [2]. In this mayhem and panic many drugs like hydroxychloroquine[3], ivermectin[4], anti-virals [5] have been put forward but after sometime the situation returns to square one.

People taking advantage of a crisis is not new. This has been happening since years of world wars.

This has now spread to the research and publication area too [6].Earlier it were the predatory journals [7] which were main culprits but now even the standard benchmark journals have been taken for a ride too [8]. The ease of publication norms and expedition of the process has been taken undue advantage of. It was originally meant to promote research and dissemination of knowledge. But this very purpose has been defeated.

The result was that journals had to lose their almost a century old reputation and had to retract the articles [9, 10].

**What are predatory journals and what is the spurious and unwanted research in context to covid-19 ?**

It was Jeffrey beall from university of Denver who popularised the term ‘predatory journals’ [6, 11]. The whole purpose of these journals revolves around quick money making by collecting article processing charges (APCs) bypassing the process of careful scrutiny and genuine peer review by subject experts. Problem with this setting is that in absence of strict quality control the fake and cooked up articles manage to get published. Such unscientific publications misguide the future research. They act like a hoax and lead to wastage of time, manpower, resources and money.

Sadly, some journals have also been lead to accept the below par level articles somehow linked to COVID 19 because of disruption of normal ongoing research projects by the corona epidemic. Most such journals are not indexed in major databases like PubMed, Scopus, Web of science, Medline etc.

The Covid-19 scenario has emerged as a boon time for all such predatory journals and the sham researchers as well.

After the standardisation of indexed medical research and the stricter and transparent review and publication norms in the recent years it has become difficult for many so called researchers to thrive in the academic setting.

It is surprising to see thousands of articles being published in journals on the COVID theme in a very short span of time. The most intriguing fact is that the authors of most of these articles may not have actually ever handled the COVID19 cases. Those who are actually at the forefront in high COVID 19 load areas and operating/managing positive cases do not have time to publish at this time.

**How to identify articles which want to ride the corona wave and bypass the strict scrutiny?**

* They have common study questions with plenty of literature already available. There is just an addition of word ‘COVID 19’ or corona ‘time’ or ‘period’.
* The already well known facts and instructions issued by international healthcare agencies are being republished by all speciality journals be it orthopaedics, general surgery etc. with little or no new/novel information except COVID 19 in the title.
* The basic standards of sterility and patient care in the operating room and outdoor which were well expected even before corona have been highlighted.
* Crossing over to the domain of other specialities specially internal and respiratory medicine is being done.
* Most of the articles are online survey based with poor level of evidence. In the absence of COVID 19 these could never have been published.

**What are the complications of these unwanted publications?**

Almost 30,000 articles have been published in the past five months alone. The data can be easily assessed on dashboard for corona research [12]. Such crazy number of research articles in such a short time and still their numbers doubling almost every 14 days (figure 1) is definitely not possible without compromising the quality and without diluting the time taking scrutiny. Waiving off of APC for corona related articles by genuine publishers has been badly misused.

Problem is that genuine and good quality articles are lost in the crowd.

It is the need of the hour to bring in strict norms and to follow due diligence before allowing articles in public domain. The pre-print and submitted manuscripts should be again analysed whether do they really contribute to the research in COVID 19 and deserve an urgent priority as the publications with vested interests may divert the direction of genuine research in this crucial time?

At the same time, the real studies of first-hand experience of handling and management of corona patients should be dealt on priority bases.

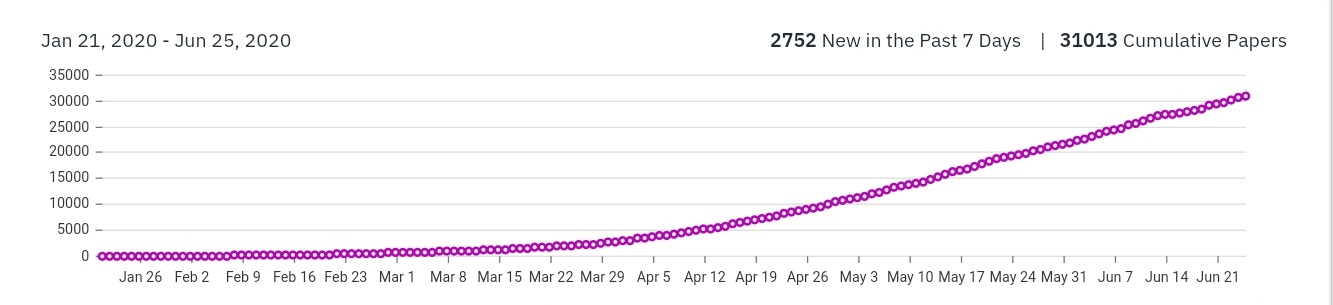
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**Figure 1**



Caption figure 1: Number of COVID related articles published in recent months12