

Editorial



Predatory Conferences: Not the Meeting You Expected

Imagine your excitement when you receive your first email inviting you to present your esteemed article in Rome. Is this invitation a dream come true or predatory? On closer look, the invitation is asking you to submit an abstract to present at the conference. It may even ask you to participate on the conference planning committee. You may not be familiar with the name of the conference, yet wonder if it could hurt to present your work at an international conference? Before you submit an abstract or register, be aware that there may be repercussions to presenting at a predatory conference. For example, when you return from the conference, you may encounter barriers to publishing your work, including issues related to publication ethics. In the August issue of *Critical Care Nurse*, I discussed concerns related to predatory journals.¹ If you are wondering what predatory conferences have to do with publishing journal articles, it is part of the bigger picture of disseminating clinical practice and science. Similar to predatory journals, predatory conferences use web crawlers to locate your information on journal websites. This editorial will help to distinguish what is real from what is predatory and discuss possible implications of presenting at a predatory conference.

Predatory conferences may be owned by predatory publishers or specialized conference groups; they have the common goal to make

a profit² and have no interest in advancing science or clinical practice.^{3,4} Conference locations are often in cities with tourism appeal, such as Rome, Dubai, Singapore, or Tokyo. Many of the invitations include terms such as *international*, *world*, or *global*. Conference names may sound suspiciously like other known meetings, with subtle differences,^{5,6} such as substituting an ampersand for “and” in the title. *Nursing17* reported that invitations had been sent on behalf of the “Nursing 2017 Organizing Committee,” yet this conference was unrelated to *Nursing17*.⁶

Some predatory conferences have falsified information on their website and misrepresented benefits such as conference accreditation or contact hours.⁷ In addition, high-profile keynote speakers advertised on conference websites may not be involved with the conference in any way; their photographs and biographies may have been stolen from other websites.^{2,8} One international nursing conference listed a multitude of nursing topics that were of interest to them, 37 in total, ranging from dental nursing, public health, surgical robotics, nurse practitioners, environmental nursing, and critical care. Because of this expansive list, you may be unlikely to find peers within your specialty area once you arrive at the conference.⁹

Researchers have questioned the quality and rigor of submitted abstracts and whether any type of peer-review process was involved in the selection of abstracts.^{4,9} Like predatory journals, predatory conferences may undermine our

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science¹ and clinical practice through the dissemination of questionable information or presentation to an inappropriate audience.¹⁰

As with predatory journal invitations, messages for predatory conference are often riddled with grammatical and content errors. Some messages contain an air of inappropriate familiarity. Other red flags are requests to extend the invitation to your colleagues or to submit a presentation abstract.¹¹ Please avoid clicking on any hyperlinks contained in these emails. I am unaware of any associated phishing attempts, but that is one risk that you and your employer cannot take. Recent examples from emails that I have received include the following:

- “On behalf of our Organizing Committee, I am writing this mail to invite you as a speaker for . . . to be held at Tokyo, Japan.”
- “I hope you have enjoyed your week. Have you thought any more about coming to . . . in Vienna this November? We have many presentations lined up which should be of interest even to those not in the field of Psychology.”
- “We still have few [sic] oral and poster slots available at the conference; if you wish to join submit you’re [sic] abstract. Do not delay as spaces are extremely limited!”
- “Based on your expertise we would like to honor you by giving the position as an Organizing Committee Member and Speaker.”
- “Hence, we request you to let us know your treasured response and an update on the feasible date of submission.”

Many times, invitations are extended for conferences outside of your discipline or area of expertise. I recently received invitations from world conferences on analytical and bioanalytical chemistry and psychology. In addition to email solicitation, I have also received personal messages through LinkedIn. A blocking feature is available on LinkedIn that requires multiple steps to complete. The only option available on the mobile app is to report the sender of the message, although this action does not block the sender. In my case, the messages became increasingly targeted and aggressive. I reported the sender and sent them a message to stop contacting me. Thankfully, the messages stopped, but the experience left me annoyed about the amount of my time that had been wasted by this conference spammer.

What happens if you mistakenly attend a predatory conference? Some conference management teams have been known to run several conferences for unrelated disciplines simultaneously. Reports exist of poor organization and attendance at some conferences.^{6,9} Additionally, if the scope of the conference is broad, it may not be the rich, global networking experience you were hoping for. Academic faculty who are being assessed for promotion and tenure often require national and international conference presentations, but they may be unable to count a predatory conference toward their quest for advancement. Some conferences publish proceedings in affiliated journals, which could be another carrot used to prey on unsuspecting academics.²

One of my colleagues presented at a predatory conference. After she submitted the abstract and finalized travel plans for the international conference, she noticed fine print on the conference website indicating that the conference management team could publish her presentation and findings for their own purposes. Unfortunately, no further details about the potential publication were provided. Does this mean that a journal owned by the same publisher as the conference could publish a conference abstract or presentation without any additional permissions?

Some journals will not consider papers for publication that have been published elsewhere, even in part.¹² This situation is disconcerting for presenters who are planning to disseminate their work by submitting an article for publication to a peer-reviewed journal. If presenters’ materials have already been published in journals linked to predatory conferences, prospective authors are in jeopardy of self-plagiarism or duplicate publication if they want to submit an article on their findings to a legitimate journal.¹³ In the worst case scenario, presenters may be unable to publish their own findings. Money and time are limited, so a predatory conference presentation may limit opportunities to present your project at a legitimate conference. In addition, conference abstracts that are published without author consent may not be entirely accurate. Experienced researchers have expressed concern that “nonexperts doing online research will have trouble distinguishing credible research from junk.”⁵

Before responding to a conference invitation, check if the conference organizer is on Beall’s list of publishers.¹⁴

A list of predatory conferences is also available online,¹⁵ and it includes a few nursing conferences. Another list highlighting differences between predator and legitimate conferences is available to help navigate confusing invitations from conferences.³

I recently started taking a more active approach that includes blocking the senders of all predatory conferences and journals. Hopefully, this action will reduce the volume of messages that I receive in the future. As a regular conference presenter, I want to make thoughtful decisions about where I present. I prefer to select conferences that are closely aligned with my research interests and target audiences. I also prioritize the support of credible conferences sponsored by professional associations, such as the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. If you are confused by an unsolicited conference invitation, I recommend that you forward it to a senior colleague or a librarian who can help you navigate the opportunity. Let's work together to avoid presenting at and attending predatory conferences to maintain the integrity of our clinical practice, science, and future publications. [CCN](#)



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