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# [Commentary] To Publish Scientific Journals: For Some, the Big Business of the Century

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## Abstract

This brief commentary addresses the escalating issues within the scientific publishing industry. The author highlights the proliferation of predatory journals and the adoption of similar profit-driven models by established publishers. He points out the ethical dilemma posed by Gold Open Access (OA) journals, which charge significant Article Publishing Charges (APC) to authors while not compensating peer reviewers. The commentary underscores the resulting strain on the peer-review process, with a decline in the availability and quality of reviewers. The author observes a shift from the traditional reciprocal peer-review system to one burdened by challenges, including shortened review deadlines, reliance on less experienced reviewers, and instances of manuscripts being unreviewed. He advocates for compensating reviewers if authors are charged for publication, warning that the current system risks the integrity of peer-reviewed research. Finally, the commentary applauds initiatives like the resignation of editorial board members from Elsevier journals to start non-profit journals, urging scientific communities to regain control of scholarly publishing.

**Keywords:** Scientific publishing, Peer review, Open Access journals, Publishing ethics, Scholarly communication.

In recent years, an unprecedentedly huge number of new scientific journals have been put into circulation. Many of them

have been classified as predatory because the main interest of their publishers is clearly to obtain rapid economic returns with very little investment. Unfortunately, a great part of the “classic” scientific publishers rapidly detected the opportunity to increase their benefits by copying this simple business model. That is to say, authors who want to see their paper published as Gold Open Access (OA) must pay significant amounts to publish these papers, while the reviewers – the key pieces in the peer-review process – do not receive a single euro/dollar for their work, which usually requires investing a notable amount of time.

Until the appearance of Gold OA papers/journals and the Article Publishing Charges (APC), the difficulties in finding suitable reviewers were relatively manageable, but right now this is becoming a very serious (and increasing) problem. I can state this based on my long expertise as Editor-in-Chief of international journals. In addition, the deadlines for review have been notably reduced, with reviewers who have accepted the invitations to review being bombarded with reminders after 7-14 days.

Throughout my long scientific career, I have reviewed dozens of manuscripts for a considerable number of journals. The key point of the classic peer-review was always the same: *today I review for you, and tomorrow you will do it for me*. Now this has deeply changed. As the authors of scientific papers know well, there are submissions that are being reviewed (and the decisions recommended) by only one reviewer given the impossibility of getting more reviewers in a reasonable time. Even some submissions are sent back to the authors without review given the impossibility of finding appropriate reviewers. Moreover, based on my knowledge, too many manuscripts are being reviewed by colleagues with limited expertise (including pre- and recent post-docs) since it is really hard – under the current conditions – for expert colleagues to accept to review.

The publishing companies should understand that if the authors must pay to publish, the reviewers should also be paid for their essential and irreplaceable job. If not, the peer-review process – as known so far – is going straight to failure. Perhaps in the near future, artificial intelligence will be capable of performing the task of the reviewers. Who knows? Meanwhile, the big companies of the sector must dig into their pockets if they really want to publish high-quality papers reviewed by the best possible reviewers.

Having to pay to publish scientific articles is a scandal of enormous proportions. This does not happen in magazines of any kind: motor, sports, cooking, fashion, furniture, art, etc., and of course, in any of the large general international magazines and newspapers. In relation to this, I would like to highlight that recently all the members of the Editorial Board of two Elsevier (the company leader as a publisher of scientific journals) journals resigned in protest at the company’s pricing policy. The goal was to launch new non-profit journals with the same aims and scope.

I applaud this initiative, which could be followed by scientific societies, universities, and large research centers around the world. Scientific journals should be in the hands of scientists and not in the hands of people for whom business always comes first.

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## Author's Biographical Note

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### Academic Appointments:

- Full Professor of Toxicology and Environmental Health, 1991-2022, School of Medicine, “Rovira i Virgili” University, Catalonia, Spain.
- Distinguished Professor, “Rovira i Virgili” University, since 2006.
- Emeritus Professor, since September 2022, School of Medicine, “Rovira i Virgili” University.
- Visiting Associate Professor, Department of Environmental Health Sciences, The Johns Hopkins University, USA, 1987.
- Visiting Professor, Department of Nutrition and Toxicology, University of California, Davis, USA, 1991 & 1993.

### Research & Publications:

- Founder and Emeritus Director of TECNATOX ([TECNATOX](#)).
- Author of 766 documents indexed in SCOPUS (as of January 2024). [SCOPUS Author Search](#).
- H-index: 88 (Scopus), 104 (Google Scholar) with over 42,800 citations ([Google Scholar Profile](#)).

### Awards & Honors:

- Highly Cited Researcher, 2014 & 2015.
- Recipient of the EUROTOX Merit Award, 2023. ([EUROTOX Merit Award](#)).

### Editorial Roles:

- Editor-in-Chief of *Food and Chemical Toxicology* (2014-2022) and *Environmental Research* (2014-2023).
- Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Human and Ecological Risk Assessment* (2010-2014).
- Associate Editor and member of Editorial Boards for various international journals.