

## EDITORIAL

# Fate of Manuscripts Rejected by Journal of Neonatal Surgery

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Traditionally, big publication houses like Blackwell, Elsevier, etc. were involved in publications of the medical books and occasionally, medical journals that represented different Medical Associations and Societies. Some of these journals competed to have affiliations of more and more Zonal/ National Associations and Societies; the turf war between *Journal of Pediatric Surgery (JPS)* and *Pediatric Surgery International (PSI)* is still vivid in my memory. Then, there were National journals like *Journal of Indian Association of Pediatric Surgeons (JIAPS)* that slowly evolved within their limitations and constraints. *JPS*, *PSI* business model survived on payment of subscription by the institutions or individuals; the authors were not charged any processing or publication fees. *JIAPS* and *Indian Pediatrics (IP)* print-copies used to be provided free to the members of the respective associations, though the journals' publishers used to charge some nominal amounts if one wished to publish photographs. It was a tedious process for the authors to send the manuscripts along with other annexures through post. A rejection used to mean repetition of the whole cycle with reprinting of the manuscript and the illustrations as desired by the journal where the author intended to resend the article. Even, a revision in response to the suggestions/ criticism of the reviewers/ editorial board used to be very cumbersome.

The scenario changed dramatically with the introduction of internet and soon the books and medical journals were being published online. More and more publications houses shifted their

attention from publication of medical books to that of medical journals. Books were being photocopied at a large scale in third world countries and stopped being the hen that laid 'golden eggs'. The subscriptions were dwindling. So, new business concepts came up. The concept of 'open access' online publications and putting the onus of payment on to the author(s) became the new norm. Many medium/ small publication houses came up; many of them swept the peer review aside started making quick money as 'Publish or Perish' concept took the center stage. These were named and shamed as '*Predatory Open Access Journals*' by Jaffery Beall. But the Publishers'/ editors' lobby used litigations to ensure that this list is withdrawn and their work goes unimpeded. The chain of deception starts with the mails from journal editors soliciting papers under the guise of Open Access. They prey on authors by charging them a fee to publish. They then pocket the money without providing any of the services provided by reputable publishers, and the unchallenged research is pushed out into the public domain. Their number is growing exponentially; they pushed 420,000 into the market in 2014, up from 53,000 in 2010 and the sheer volume of their emails is a reckoning force.

With so much to compete with (both in ethical and unethical world), starting and maintaining *Journal of Neonatal Surgery (JNS)* that charges neither any subscription fee, nor any publication/ processing fee, is maniacal. But still few of us have persisted for the last six years to put our time and money to sustain *JNS* that is the

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only journal available globally focusing on Neonatal Surgery. We often witness authors who have something novel to share, but who are inept at English writing, grammar or syntax. At times, I have spent hours and hours copyediting and improving a single manuscript. But at other times, we do reject the unworthy manuscripts. The reason could be varied- the reported material/subjects may be beyond neonatal age; the supporting evidence including illustrations may be of poor quality; the research methodology is poor, or occasionally, it may be just a coincidence that a similar case report had been published in the near past. In all, we rejected 102 out of 516 manuscripts (approximately 1/5<sup>th</sup> of all) received during the period September 2012 to December 2016.

I was all curious to know the fate of these 102 manuscripts rejected by JNS and to identify the factors facilitating publication of a rejected manuscript elsewhere. Database (PubMed) and Google searches were performed to trace the manuscripts published elsewhere any time after rejection by *Journal of Neonatal Surgery*.

Fifty two percent of the rejected submissions (53 out of the 102) were eventually (till December 2017) published elsewhere. These manuscripts subsequently appeared in 42 different journals. Only 3 of these 42 journals were provided Journal Impact Factor by Thomson Reuters in the Journal Citation Report of 2016, namely *BMC Pediatrics* (2.071), *Balkan Medical Journal* (1.083) and *West Indian Medical Journal* (0.224). Although *JNS* doesn't appear on that list, but we had manually calculated 2-year Journal Impact Factor as 0.5 for the year 2016.

*Journal of Clinical Neonatology* (JCN) published maximum number of these rejected manuscripts (n=5) (Table 1). It was humbling to know that at least on 7 occasions, the authors chose JNS over more established and older journals of Pediatric Surgery, namely, *JIAPS* (n=4), *African Journal of Paediatric Surgery* (n=2), and *Annals of Pediatric Surgery* (n=1).

Of all the 42 journals, at least 13 were more than 10 years old and are going to be referred

henceforth to as 'established journals'. Only 13/42 (31%) of these journals were indexed with PubMed Central. Majority of these journals published quarterly, but as many as 8- *A and A Case Reports*, *International Journal of Advanced Research*, *International Journal of Health Sciences and Research*, *International Journal of Pediatrics*, *Journal of Clinical and Diagnostic Research*, *Journal of College of Physicians and Surgeons of Pakistan*, *Journal of Medical Case Reports*, and *Pediatrics Polska* (Polish Pediatrics) published monthly issues.

It is disheartening to note that the majority of the authors of these 53 rejected manuscripts didn't apply much mind to the type/ kind of the journal, and whether they would be ever accessed by the Neonatal Surgeons' fraternity. For example, one of the rejected articles 'Neonatal sepsis in a tertiary hospital from the central region of Saudi Arabia' was published in *International Journal of Advanced Research* that publishes articles from Health Sciences, Physical, Chemical Sciences and Engineering, Social Sciences and Humanities in the same journal.

It is not always easy to sustain continued publication; *Hindawi* closed down *International Journal of Embryology* after publishing only 3 articles in 2014. Publishers of *Journal of Surgical Technique and Case Report* and *International Archives of Medicine* closed their shop after 2015 and 2016 respectively. *Journal of Reproductive Health and Contraception* published only 5 issues and stopped publishing after the 1<sup>st</sup> issue in early 2017. It is not hard to make out that many of these journals are predatory in nature and didn't indulge in any genuine peer review. Let us take an example- Srivastava P, et al. Role of T-tube in single stage management of rectal atresia in newborn. *American Journal of Oral Medicine and Radiology*. 2014;1(1):14-16.' *McMed International Publication*, claiming to be the largest publication in the world on its website, with its office in Chennai, India, accepted a publication regarding a congenital anomaly of the 'rear end' in a journal that deals with Oral Medicine and Dentistry. Also, at least one of the co-authors of this case series is a renowned Pediatric Surgeon with plethora of publications to his credit.

Table1: Journals (#) that published 53 manuscripts rejected by JNS.

No.	Name of Journal	N	1 <sup>st</sup> issue	OA	No.	Name of Journal	N	1 <sup>st</sup> issue	OA
1	Abant Medical Journal	1	2012		22	Journal of Clinical and Diagnostic Research	2	2007	Y
2	African Journal of Paediatric Surgery	2	2004*	Y	23	Journal of Clinical Neonatology	5	2012	Y
3	American Journal of Oral Medicine and Radiology	1	2014	Y	24	Journal of College of Physicians and Surgeons of Pakistan	1	1991*	Y
4	A&A Case Reports	1	2008		25	Journal of Reproductive Health and Contraception	1	2016	Y
5	Annals of Pediatric Surgery	1	2005*		26	Journal of Indian Association of Pediatric Surgeons	4	1995*	Y
6	Balkan Medical Journal	1	1979*	Y	27	Journal of Medical Case Reports	1	2007	Y
7	BJ Kines-National Journal of Basic & Applied Sciences	1	2009	Y	28	Journal of Nepal Paediatric Society	2	2008	Y
8	BMC Pediatrics	1	2001*	Y	29	Journal of Pediatric Neonatal Care	2	2014	Y
9	BMJ Case Reports	1	2008	Y	30	Journal of Pediatric Intensive Care	1	2012	
10	Case Reports in Clinical Practice	1	2016	Y	31	Journal of Pediatric Surgery Case Reports	1	2013	Y
11	Folia Medica (Plovdiv) Journal	1	1958*	Y	32	Journal of Research in Medical Education & Ethics	1	2011	
12	Indian Journal of Basic and Applied Medical Research	1	2011	Y	33	Journal of Surgery and Transplant Science	1	2013	Y
13	Indian Journal of Health and Well being	1	2009		34	Journal of Surgical Technique and Case Report	1	2009	
14	Indian Journal of Medical and Paediatric Oncology	1	1994*	Y	35	Journal of Tropical Pediatrics	1	1971*	
15	Indian Journal of Neonatal Medicine and Research	1	2013	Y	36	Korean Journal of Pancreas Biliary Tract	1	1996*	Y
16	International Archives of Medicine	1	2008	Y	37	New Indian Journal of Surgery	1	2010	Y
17	International Journal of Advanced Research	1	2013	Y	38	Pediatrica Polska (Polish Pediatrics)	1	1926*	
18	International Journal of Basic and Applied Medical Sciences	1	2011	Y	39	Saudi Surgical Journal	1	2013	Y
19	International Journal of Embryology	1	2014	Y	40	SM Journal of Pediatric Surgery		2015	Y
20	International Journal of Health Sciences and Research	1	2011	Y	41	Turkiye Klinikleri Journal of Case Reports		1983*	Y
21	International Journal of Pediatrics	1	2013	Y	42	West Indian Medical Journal		1951*	Y

#in alphabetical order

\*established journals defined as 1<sup>st</sup> issue published more than 10 years ago, before 2006.

OA=open access; Y=Yes

I wondered if sending the manuscripts to such non-descript and waning journals affect the citation rate. May be not- Gupta R, et al. Variants of Currarino Syndrome: Embryological Association and Review of Pertinent Literature. International Journal of Embryology Volume 2014 (2014), Article ID 636375, 5 pages <http://dx.doi.org/10.1155/2014/636375>, still managed to get two citations. Such is the impact of internet and free availability of full-text manuscripts in open-access journals.

One of the most important issues for the authors these days is the money they have to shell out. Like *JNS*, certain other journals such *JIAPS*, *Indian Journal of Medical and Paediatric Oncology*, *Journal of Nepal Paediatric Society*, *Journal of College of Physicians and Surgeons of Pakistan* and *Turkiye Klinikleri Journal of Case Reports* don't levy any publication or processing fee. It is easy to make out that other than *JNS* that runs on some unmatched utopian values, all other such journals are official journals of National Medical Associations and have some other way of funding. But if we look at the other side of the spectrum, there are journals from the list in table 1 that charge up to 3000 USD as the pro-

cessing fee. The median article processing fee is 200 USD, but there are many that charge 500 or 1000 USD. Surprisingly, these steep charges were not a deterrent to even the authors from the developing world. We wonder whether we should start charging some nominal article processing fee too. The question is open to all its stakeholders alike-the editorial board, the authors and the readers.

My observational study has certain limitations. Individual authors were not consulted to detect the actual publication rate of rejected manuscripts; the findings were only based on internet retrieval. Some of the rejected articles may have been published in journals with a more local distribution and in other languages, which were not indexed or identified by the database and search engines used in this study. I also do not know if the authors used reviewers' comments from *JNS* to revise their manuscripts to improve the chance of subsequent publication, and whether there was a significant change in the content of finally published manuscript. A more detailed evaluation of rejected submissions will allow me to more objectively assess the role of *JNS* in pediatric health care and research.