

THE PROBLEM OF PREDATORY PUBLISHERS

The US-based Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has fined Hyderabad-based company OMICS International over \$ 50 million for deceptive practices. According to their website, the company OMICS publishes over 700 journals and organizes over 3000 conferences internationally. Areas include medicine, pharma, science, technology and business. They also claim to have over 50,000 leading experts on their editorial boards.

Dr Shrinubabu Gedela is the CEO of OMICS International. He completed his B Pharm, MTech and PhD from Andhra University, and his Post-doctoral research from Stanford University. Travails during attempts to access high quality journals as a student inspired him to publish his own open access journal in 2007, called Journal of Proteomics and Bioinformatics. After that, there was no looking back and a slew of journals in a wide range of subjects were started. He then forayed into organization of International Conferences and events. By 2016, the company was counting a revenue of \$11.6 million and a profit of \$1.2 million.

The biggest critic of the OMICS group has been an American librarian Jeffrey Beall who coined the term 'predatory publishing.' He first got curious in 2008 when he started receiving numerous requests from dubious journals to serve on their editorial board. Since 2008, he started publishing a list of 'potential, possible, probable or possible predatory scholarly open access journals' famously called the Beall's List. In 2013, an OMICS journal accepted a bogus and obviously flawed publication submitted as part of a sting operation by the journal Science.

Objections by the FTC include sham peer-reviewing, naming researchers as editors without their permission, inaccurate impact factors, and not informing researchers of the publication fee till manuscript is accepted for publication.

Though some of the journals and articles published by the company may be genuine, quality control overall seems to be under doubt. The deeper problem is that these doubts shake the faith in science overall. (*The Hindu* 3 April 2019)

'MAKE LISTENING SAFE' INITIATIVE BY WHO

Smartphone usage by children and adolescents has grown explosively. Nearly 50% of young people between 12-35 years listen to unsafe levels of sound through their personal audio devices such as smart phones and MP3 players. It is estimated that 5-10% of these will develop hearing loss. This sound-induced hearing loss is irreversible. However, it may be prevented.

The WHO's 'Make Hearing Safe' Initiative aims to address this issue by proving guidelines for the phone industry, the government and parents. The WHO recommends that phones and audio devices include systems to track the amount and

duration of sound exposure, which is called *acoustic dosimetry*. For example, in children the limit is 75 dBL SPA for 40 hours per week. Whenever the user reaches 100% of their weekly output, it must give a message so that users can reduce the volume. There can be options for parental control. There can be tracking systems to help users know their listening habits with cues for safe listening. The device should provide a daily summary message based on the user's listening behavior over the past days, encouraging safe listening habits and discouraging or warning against unsafe listening habits. Governments must work with industry to enforce regulations to limit excessive sound exposures.

Pediatricians are at a unique position to help by timely preventive advice to teenagers.

(<https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/280086/9789241515283-eng.pdf>)

AAP RECOMMENDATIONS TO PREVENT DROWNING

In children between 1-4 years, drowning is the commonest cause of injury-related deaths in the US. The American Academy of Pediatrics has issued updates to its recommendations to prevent drowning in children. New parents are advised to empty all buckets and other containers after use, to prevent curious toddlers from falling in. Parents and caregivers must never leave children alone while near pools, bathtubs, spas or open water. Young children should not be left alone in the bathroom.

When infants or toddlers are in or around the water, a supervising adult with swimming skills should be within an arm's length, providing constant 'touch supervision.' Even with older children and better swimmers, the supervising adult must focus on the child and not get distracted by phones or other activities.

All parents must train their children in swimming, which is considered an important life skill. It protects against drowning. What is the appropriate age to start swimming lessons? Not all children are ready at the same age. Some are ready as early as one year, but for most children, it's around their 4th birthday. At this age, they usually can learn basic water survival skills such as floating, treading water and getting to an exit point. By age 5 or 6, most children in swim lessons can master the front crawl. Besides prevention of drowning, parents need to check that the pool has adequate disinfection with chlorine. And that swimsuits for young children fit snugly at the legs to prevent body waste spreading into the water.

This is all good summer time advice for parents. (*Pediatrics* March 2019; <https://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2019/03/13/peds.2019-0850>)

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