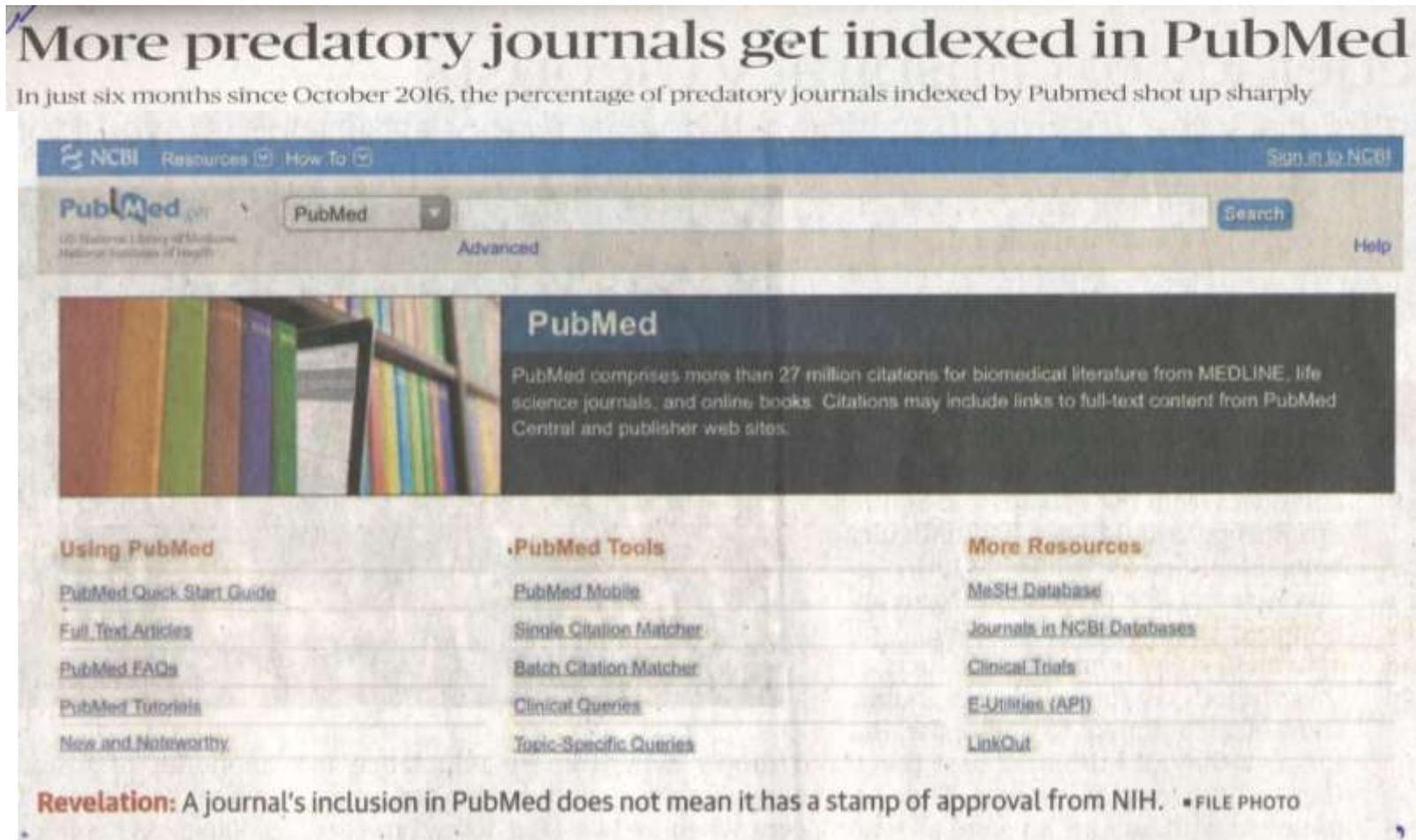




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More predatory journals get indexed in PubMed
 In just six months since October 2016, the percentage of predatory journals indexed by Pubmed shot up sharply

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 US National Library of Medicine
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PubMed
 PubMed comprises more than 27 million citations for biomedical literature from MEDLINE, life science journals, and online books. Citations may include links to full-text content from PubMed Central and publisher web sites.

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Revelation: A journal's inclusion in PubMed does not mean it has a stamp of approval from NIH. FILE PHOTO

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R. PRASAD

Among other things, the next time you see a questionable journal proudly announcing that it is indexed in Pubmed, chances are that the journal is predatory.

Contrary to the popular notion that only genuine and distinguished journals which take peer-reviewing seriously and follow all the norms of scientific publishing are indexed in PubMed, many predatory journals too are included in PubMed. The same holds true for PubMed Central too.

According to PubMed, more than 27 million citations for biomedical literature from MEDLINE and other journals and online books are included. And herein lies the problem. Among other journals indexed are thousands of predatory journals, and their numbers are increasing at an alarming rate.

"The PubMed database managers have irresponsibly allowed it to become a repository of citations to predatory journal articles," Jeffrey Beall, Librarian at the University of Colorado Denver and publisher of the famous Scholarly Open Access blog that

was shut down in January this year says in an email to *The Hindu*. "PubMed should not be used as a whitelist."

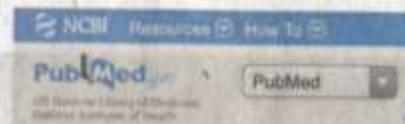
The survey results

Now, according to a Correspondence published in *The Lancet*, two surveys carried by researchers have revealed that predatory journals in the field of neuroscience and neurology "outnumber those regularly indexed in the main biomedical databases".

In October 2016, the percentage of predatory journals in the field of rehabilitation, neuroscience and neurology indexed in PubMed stood at 12%, 11.4% and 20.2% respectively. In April 2017, in a matter of six months, these figures shot up sharply – 23.7% for rehabilitation, 16.1% for neuroscience, and 24.7% for neurology.

Raise the bar

Considering that PubMed handles millions of queries daily and health researchers worldwide regularly turn to it for information, it is "worrisome that PubMed includes journals with seriously flawed peer review processes" the researchers write in the Correspondence. Dr. Beall had warned



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about this a year ago: "It is misleading that these potentially low-quality articles, many of which have not undergone rigorous peer review, are featured prominently in PubMed searches."

In a blog post "Don't use PubMed as a journal whitelist" dated October 20th, 2016, Dr. Beall had written: "I recommend against using PubMed as a list of quality journals for the purposes of finding a journal to publish in,

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PubMed's reach and when cited by reputable journals will not only gain legitimacy but also severely impact the scientific records, they say.

The Bohannon sting

Following the John Bohannon sting operation in August 2013 when a mundane paper with grave errors was sent out to 304 Open-Access publishers, including 167 from the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), 121 from Beall's list.

If the 82% publishers who were in Dr. Beall's list accepted the questionable paper, nearly 45% of DOAJ publishers too did not reject the paper.

The DOAJ has subsequently tightened its guidelines for inclusion. Since March 2014, DOAJ has received about 1,600 applications from Open-Access publishers in India as part of this revision process. While only 4% (74) were from genuine publishers and accepted, 78% were rejected and remaining 18% are still being processed. One of the main reasons for rejection was the predatory or questionable nature of the journals.

It is now time for PubMed to clean up the mess.

PubMed does not mean it has a stamp of approval from NIH. •FILE PHOTO

evaluating academic performance, awarding grants and degrees, and assessing job candidates."

"A journal's inclusion in PubMed does not mean the journal has a stamp of approval from NIH [National Institutes of Health]. There is such a low barrier to inclusion that researchers are advised to be suspicious of any journal that boasts about its inclusion in PubMed, especially if the

boasting is prominently displayed on the journal's main web page. PubMed inclusion is not an achievement that merits boasts," he noted in his post.

Echoing what Dr. Beall had written about a year ago that PubMed's value would decrease as the number of papers from predatory journals increases, the researchers writing in *The Lancet* have also cautioned PubMed. Predatory journals would stand to gain from