



# Predatory publishing, hijacking of legitimate journals and impersonation of researchers via special issue announcements: a warning for editors and authors about a new scam

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The current world of academic publication is plagued with stories of predatory publishing, journal hijacking, and the like, with much discussion [1–12].

Recently, several proposals have been received by this journal for a Special Issue. The proposals are sometimes well written and appear to come from well credentialed researchers, using the email addresses of the said researchers, with links to valid web profiles. On one occasion the proposers were asked to provide more detailed information on various aspects of the proposal, and they did so promptly and professionally. However, there is a catch to these proposals; the email addresses being used to represent the proposed special issue editors have very slight changes (e.g. insertion of a single letter in the middle of the name, replacement of a full-stop with a dash etc.) indicating that the apparent proposers are actually being impersonated.

The impersonators seek Special Issue announcements in legitimate journals, using the false email accounts. Any correspondence and enquiries regarding the special issue would then go to the fake email address rather than the real researchers. Presumably the aim of this practice is to use the fake email addresses, along with the real names of the impersonated editors and the journal itself, as a point of contact to collect money from enquiring authors.

Even while writing this editorial, an email was received from a ‘publisher’ advertising an update on special issues with 33 special issue titles in 16 purported journals, a link to a conference website and with the note ‘Important: Send your invited paper (with the correct XXXX format) by email to XXXX.transactions@gmail.com (the hashes replacing letters used)—obviously reputable publishing houses have their own domain and do not need to use gmail or any of the

other free email services (I also note that the publisher being impersonated in the above email actually appears on Beall’s List, so even these publishers are not safe). Although this is a somewhat different problem than impersonating reputable researchers in an actual journal, it does highlight that Special Issues of journals are an attractive way to entice eager authors away from their money.

This journal always has and always will strive to be ethical and maintain rigorous academic standards, therefore the purpose of this editorial is to provide a warning to editors and potential authors interested in submitting to special issues of legitimate journals—the more widely this is known, the fewer people who will be caught.

Potential authors and readers of this journal should note the following:

1. This journal will not be publishing Special Issues under the current name of *Physical and Engineering Sciences in Medicine*, or the previous name of *Australasian Physical & Engineering Sciences in Medicine* in the foreseeable future. The last special issue was in Volume 41, Issue 4 [13].
2. If Special Issues are recommenced in the future, it will only be after an editorial notification such as this one, published in the journal by the Editor in Chief, with page numbers, and indexed in the major publishing databases (e.g. Web of Science, Scopus etc.) thus allowing independent verification of its authenticity—any advertised special issue prior to such notification will not be valid. Do not respond to any requests for submission of papers to special issues in this journal.
3. This journal only accepts manuscripts via the online submission system operated by the publisher, which can be accessed via the publisher’s website. We do not accept email submission and will never request email submission of manuscripts.

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4. This journal does not maintain its own website. The only valid website for this journal is via the publisher Springer <https://www.springer.com/journal/13246>. Note that the name and abbreviation of the journal are not included in the web address. Before submitting manuscripts, readers should check that the web address on your browser is part of the publisher's main website, i.e. [www.springer.com](http://www.springer.com). Any other website claiming to be the website for this journal is not valid.
5. This journal operates as a hybrid journal, which means that open access is an option only. Authors are not required to pay fees to publish in this journal if they do not choose the open access option for their article.
6. If authors do choose to publish in this journal via open access, payment arrangements are made via the publisher during the publication process, not the journal. Most importantly, any email or contact directly from this journal regarding fees will not be valid.

Additionally, the following diligence is recommended regarding special issues for any journal:

1. Authors considering submitting to a special issue of any journal should carefully check the email addresses of the handling editors. Do an independent web search for the special issue editors and check that the email addresses exactly match that given on their institutional web profiles. Do this even if the special issue announcement is on a major publisher's website and is in a valid journal, as fraudsters are seeking real journals as the conduit for their activities.
2. Researchers should regularly search their own name along with 'special issue', as the key to success for fraudsters in this practice is borrowing good reputations via impersonation.

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