



# PLANETARY HEALTH WEEKLY

BRINGING YOU CURRENT NEWS ON ECOLOGICAL WELLNESS & GLOBAL HEALTH

Volume 4, Number 30

<https://planetaryhealthweekly.com>

July 26, 2018

## WILDFIRES RAGE IN ARCTIC CIRCLE AS SWEDEN CALLS FOR HELP

At least 11 wildfires are raging inside the Arctic Circle as the hot, dry summer turns an abnormally wide area of Europe into a tinderbox. The worst affected country, Sweden, has called for emergency assistance from its partners in the European Union to help fight the blazes, which have broken out across a wide range of its territory and prompted the evacuations of four communities. Tens of thousands of people have been warned to remain inside and close windows and vents to avoid smoke inhalation. Rail services have been disrupted. The risk remains “extremely high”. Much of the northern hemisphere has sweltered in unusually hot weather in recent weeks, breaking records from Algeria to California and causing fires from Siberia to Yorkshire. Ukraine has also been hit especially hard by wildfires. [Read more on The Guardian.](#)



Credit: Mats Anderson

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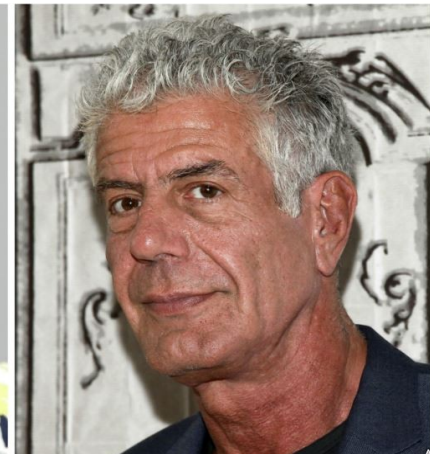
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Backpage: Jocalyn Clark, Executive Editor, The Lancet

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## CALLS FOR MORE SUICIDE PREVENTION EFFORTS AS RATES RISE

The recent suicide deaths of two well known personalities, Anthony Bourdain and designer Kate Spade come at a time when more Americans are dying from suicide than ever before. This according to the CDC which notes that suicide rates have risen in 49 of the 50 states. But suicide is not just a US problem. Each year, about 800,000 people worldwide die as a result of suicide. That number does not include the countless others who attempt to take their lives. WHO estimates that every 40 seconds, someone in the world ends his or her life. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among 15 to 29-year-olds worldwide. Nearly 80 percent of suicides in 2015 took place in low- and middle-income countries. [Read more on VOA News.](#)



Credit: VOA News





## CANADA'S HIGH ARCTIC GLACIERS AT RISK OF DISAPPEARING COMPLETELY

Hundreds of glaciers in Canada's high Arctic are shrinking and many are at risk of disappearing completely, an unprecedented inventory of glaciers in the country's northernmost island has revealed. Using satellite imagery, researchers catalogued more than 1,700 glaciers in northern Ellesmere Island and traced how they had changed between 1999 and 2015. The results offered a glimpse into how warming temperatures may be affecting ice in the region, from glaciers that sprawl across the land to the 200-metre thick ice shelves, said Adrienne White, a glaciologist at the University of Ottawa. "It's an area that's very difficult to study." [Read more on The Guardian.](#)

Credit: Silver Sea

## LA IS DOING WATER BETTER THAN YOUR CITY

The frantic phone calls to the Community Water Center began in the summer of 2014. In East Porterville, nestled against California's Sierra Nevada mountains, homeowners' wells were failing amid a historic drought. Folks were hauling water from their workplaces or from agricultural wells. Parents were sending their kids to shower at the local high school. Residents with still-functional wells were snaking hoses over fences to nourish their neighbors. East Porterville's situation is extreme, but it is not an outlier. California is in trouble. The state is not ready for this new reality, but one city south of Porterville could teach California how to survive desiccation: Los Angeles. It is in the midst of an aqueous awakening, setting ambitious goals. The city is diving into a series of high- and low-tech campaigns that could transform it into a model city for water management. This is bigger than LA; it is about fundamentally changing humanity's perverse relationship with water. [Read more on Wired.](#)



Credit: Wired



## ANCIENT TREES DIE IN AFRICA: CLIMATE CHANGE NAMED AS SUSPECT IN DEATHS

Scientists have discovered that most of the oldest and largest African baobab trees have died over the past 12 years. They suspect the demise may be linked to climate change. The tree can grow to an enormous size, and may live hundreds if not thousands of years. The researchers, from universities in South Africa, Romania and the US, say the loss of the trees is "an event of an unprecedented magnitude". The trees are found in a region with harsh climate under normal conditions, in Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa, Botswana and Zambia. Climate change may have stressed them beyond their limits. Disease does not seem to be implicated. The age and size of the trees may have been a contributing factor. [Read more on Daily Kos.](#)

Credit: Getty Images



## 'WE NO LONGER DIE IN CHILDBIRTH': HOW INDIAN VILLAGES SAVED THEIR MOTHERS

The message written on a poster, hung between trees that offer shade, spells out what has been achieved in this rural Indian village: "We no longer die in childbirth." For the women of Purabgaon, in Uttar Pradesh, expectations had always been clear. Get married young, then have back-to-back pregnancies and have babies delivered in unsanitary conditions at home by a dai, a village midwife with no training and many superstitions. The maternal mortality rate has been one of the highest in the world – 451 deaths per 100,000 live births. Anaemia is one key problem: around 55% of Indian women are anaemic, and rural women's diets are often poor. Save a Mother aims to educate rural women about pregnancy, nutrition, immunisation, delivery and care of the child. [Read more on The Guardian.](#)

Credit: Amrit Dhillon

## SCIENTISTS AIM TO STOP THE DEVASTATION OF ZIKA-LIKE PANDEMICS

For several months, health workers have been battling to contain an Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, now just ended. A total of 60 cases, 28 of them fatal, had been reported around the town of Mbandaka. Politicians, nevertheless, remain nervous. Thousands died in the West African Ebola outbreak of 2014 after the virus – which probably spread from infected animals, such as fruit bats – triggered widespread cases of severe, sometimes fatal, internal bleeding. Ebola is one of a series of previously unknown diseases – others include Sars and Zika – that have recently appeared without warning and devastated communities, having jumped from animal populations to humans. [Read more on The Guardian.](#)



Credit: Alamy



## A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF OBESITY PREVENTION POLICIES AND STRATEGIES IN CANADA

Obesity is a chronic disease characterized by abnormal or excessive fat accumulation to the extent that health is impaired. Public health obesity prevention policies have been criticized for promoting a simplistic narrative about personal irresponsibility and lack of willpower among people with obesity. These assumptions contribute to the beliefs that people with obesity and their children lack awareness and knowledge about healthy eating and physical activity and are to blame for the obesity epidemic. But extensive research shows that weight bias can affect a person's mental health, interpersonal relationships, educational achievements and employment opportunities; it can lead to avoidance of health promoting behaviours, hinder weight management efforts, and increase overall morbidity and mortality. Public health obesity policies may be unintentionally contributing to weight bias. [Read more on Can J Public Health.](#) See also:

[A response to "A critical analysis of obesity prevention policies and strategies"](#)

Credit: Karl Whitefield



## MILESTONES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

Humanity is in a race against time. Our planet is warming. We are witnessing a scorching summer on a global scale. The Arctic is melting. Oceans are the hottest ever recorded. The evidence is irrefutable. However, the world is waking up to this new reality. And change is happening. Countries are gearing up to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions to meet their Paris Agreement targets. Governments, corporations and individuals are beginning to address the climate problem with thousands of new initiatives and actions to mitigate against the effects of climate change and bend the curve on rising emissions. Ireland is becoming the world's first country to divest from fossil fuels. A Spanish energy company has just announced that it will no longer pursue a growth strategy for its oil and gas business. 350.org's Bill McKibben is highly critical of Canada's dismal performance on the world climate action stage. [Read more on Below 2 C.](#)

Credit: 350.org

## SPOTLIGHT ON POLICY: WORLD'S PROTECTED AREAS BEING RAPIDLY DESTROYED BY HUMANITY

One-third of the world's protected land is under intense human pressure, according to an international study. The University of Queensland-led research has found six million square kilometres of protected land - equivalent to two-thirds the size of China - is in a state unlikely to conserve endangered biodiversity. The scale of damage was striking, with the greatest impacts found in heavily populated places in Asia, Europe and Africa. They found major road infrastructure, industrial agriculture, and even entire cities occurring inside the boundaries of places supposed to be set aside for nature conservation. More than 90 per cent of protected areas, such as national parks and nature reserves, showed some signs of damaging human activities. [Read more on EurekAlert.](#)



Credit: Flickr



Credit: CBC

## SPOTLIGHT ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES: WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN CANADA?

Indigenous people in Canada include First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI). With so much to learn about them — from traditions to art — where do you start? Here's a list of some amazing resources, including books, games and activities: The Canadian Museum of History has some really fun online games, puzzles and colouring pages; Indigenous comic books; Indigenous Picture Books; Indigenous Video Games; a Colouring Book- the Stained Glass Window Commemorating the Legacy of Residential Schools; a 32-Page fun booklet from the Government of Canada celebrating National Indigenous Peoples Day; and the CBC Kids Website. [Read more on CBC.](#)



**The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan:** "Encouraging more Londoners to switch from diesel to electric is critical cleaning up the air and reducing emissions which is why I am introducing the world's first Ultra Low Emission Zone from next April. Widespread change is simply not going to happen until vehicle manufacturers ditch outdated technology."

**Mayor of Medellín, Federico Gutierrez Zuluaga:** "Our purpose is to become the capital of electric mobility in Latin America to positively impact the welfare of our people. We promote sustainable means of transport, we are replacing and buying electrical buses and we that have decided that 100% of the new vehicles will also be electrical. In addition, we are committed to promoting the renewal of the diesel or gasoline public transport fleet to 100% electrical vehicles"

**Mayor of Pittsburgh William Peduto:** "Governments have the purchasing power to force manufacturers to start meeting our demands and provide off-the-shelf electric vehicle technologies. The message is: If you make them, we'll buy them."

# EVENTS TABLE

Sept 29	7th Annual Action Global Health Network Conference	Ottawa Canada	<a href="http://www.aghnconference.com/">http://www.aghnconference.com/</a>
Oct 8-12	5th Global Symposium on Health Systems Research	Liverpool England	<a href="http://healthsystemsresearch.org/hsr2018/">http://healthsystemsresearch.org/hsr2018/</a>
Oct 18	Integrative Health Institute Conference	Edmonton, Canada	<a href="https://www.ualberta.ca/integrative-health-institute">https://www.ualberta.ca/integrative-health-institute</a>
Nov 15-19	4th People’s Health Assembly	Dhaka Bangladesh	<a href="http://www.phmovement.org/en/node/10805">http://www.phmovement.org/en/node/10805</a>
Nov 19-21	Canadian Conference on Global Health	Toronto Canada	<a href="http://www.csih.org/en/events/canadian-conference-global-health">http://www.csih.org/en/events/canadian-conference-global-health</a>
March 8-10, 2019	10th annual CUGH Conference - Translation and Implementation for Impact in Global Health	Chicago USA	Panel and Abstract proposal deadline - August 25, 2018 <a href="http://www.cugh2019.org/">http://www.cugh2019.org/</a>



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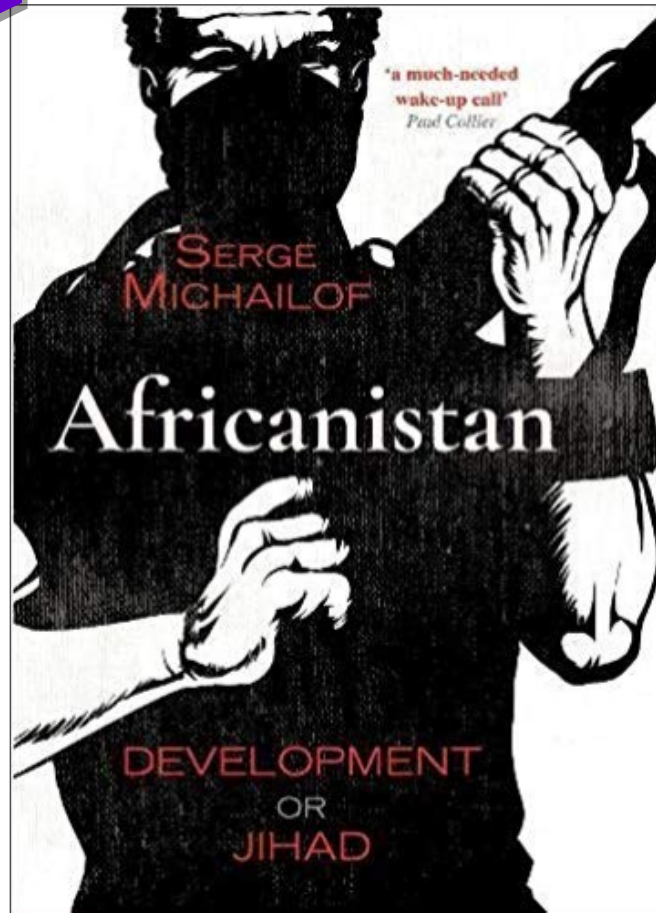


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# NEW BOOK- AFRICANISTAN: DEVELOPMENT OR JIHAD



Credit: Amazon

While progress in Africa can be seen across the board, migrants are dying every day in the Mediterranean. The continent is in fact a powder keg. The powder is demographics. And the detonator is unemployment. What is worrying for the continent is even more dramatic for the Sahel, a huge region of about 100 million inhabitants, where insecurity is spreading and which may act as a detonator for West Africa with a population of 700 million in 25 years.

The mass unemployment of young people far more than jihadist propaganda, is the primary explanation for the dramatic collapse of Afghanistan. Despite major differences in geography and culture, there are huge similarities between the Sahel and Afghanistan: increasing insecurity, drug trafficking, and the spread of radical Islam being the most worrisome.

Unfortunately the same recipes that failed in Afghanistan are again being rolled out in the Sahel. Without a radical change in the international community's behaviour, we will soon be confronted with, first, a 'Sahelistan' and then an 'Africanistan,' an African Afghanistan, but five- or ten-times worse.

Noting that West Africa's Sahel region -- Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali and Chad -- are in the midst of "the most spectacular demographic growth in the whole of human history," the authors drive home a point which might be self-evident to you, but seems to elude many. Namely, this nearly unfathomably rapid growth is not conducive to peace, security or human welfare.

[Read more on Amazon.](#)

# YOUR RECYCLING GETS RECYCLED, RIGHT? MAYBE, OR MAYBE NOT



Credit: Wiqan Ang

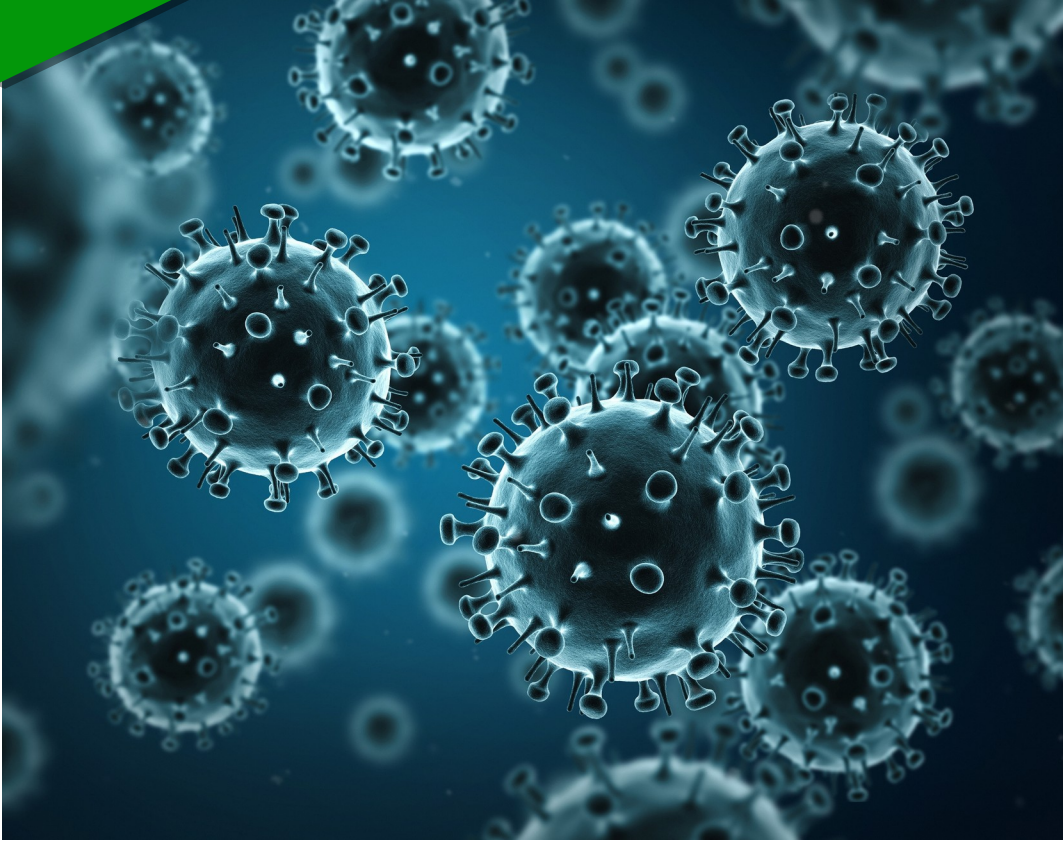
Oregon is serious about recycling. Its residents are accustomed to dutifully separating milk cartons, yogurt containers, cereal boxes and kombucha bottles from their trash to divert them from the landfill. But this year, because of a far-reaching rule change in China, some of the recyclables are ending up in the local dump anyway. Since Jan. 1 China has banned imports of various types of plastic and paper, and tightened standards for materials it does accept.

In recent months, in fact, thousands of tons of material left curbside for recycling in dozens of cities and towns have gone to landfills.

While some waste managers already send their recyclable materials to be processed domestically, or are shipping more to other countries, others have been unable to find a substitute for the Chinese market.

[Read more on The New York Times.](#)

# SYNTHETIC BIOLOGICAL WEAPONS MAY BE COMING. HERE'S HOW TO FIGHT THEM

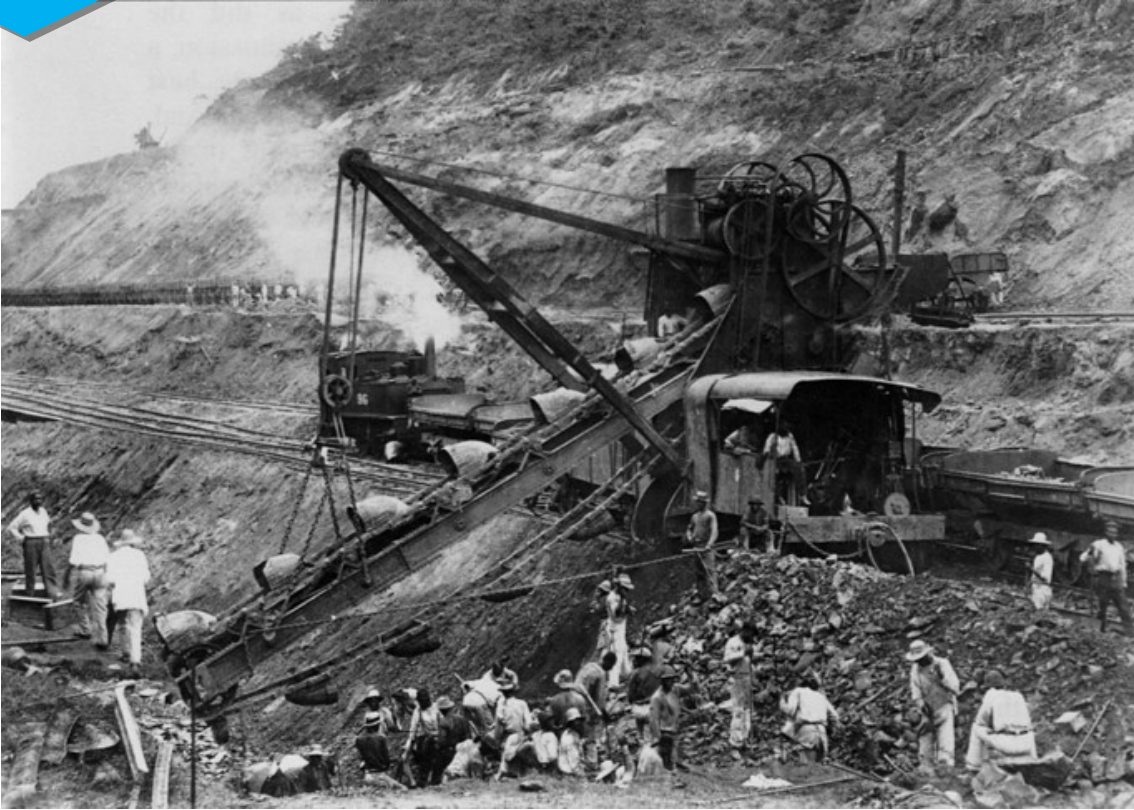


Credit: Canstock

Just about anyone can be a biohacker now. Gene editing technology is cheaper and simpler than ever, and the US Department of Defense is paying close attention. After all, scientists have already used the tech to build a strain of horsepox, a virus not too genetically distant from smallpox, from scratch just for the fun of it. It may only be a matter of time before synthetic biology, such as weaponized pathogens, finds its way into a military's or terrorist's arsenal. In order to stay prepared, the DoD commissioned the National Academy of Sciences to release a comprehensive report about the state of American biodefense. As the report suggests, it's not great. In the report, a team of scientists ranked the potential threats from gene editing and other bioengineering techniques, and examined what could be done to protect against them, taking into account how advances in bioengineering would make it more difficult to combat these threats. As MIT Technology Review reported, the DoD is most concerned that people might recreate known infectious viruses or enhance bacteria to become even more dangerous.

Many of the DoD's official recommendations, such as investing in public health and advanced vaccines, run directly contrary to current federal government priorities. Right now, the government pours money into defense but also slashes the public health infrastructure. [Read more on Futurism.](#)

# THE PANAMA CANAL'S FORGOTTEN CASUALTIES



Credit: Mashable

It was the greatest infrastructure project the world had ever seen. When the 77 kilometre-long Panama Canal officially opened in 1914, after 10 years of construction, it fulfilled a vision that had tempted people for centuries, but had long seemed impossible.

“Never before has man dreamed of taking such liberties with nature,” wrote journalist Arthur Bullard in awe.

But the project, which employed more than 40,000 labourers, also took immense liberties with human life. Thousands of workers were killed. The official number is 5,609, but many historians think the real toll was several times higher. Hundreds, if not thousands, more were permanently injured.

How did the United States government, which was responsible for the project, reconcile this tremendous achievement with the staggering cost to human lives and livelihoods?

They handled it the same way governments still do today: They doled out a combination of triumphant rhetoric and just enough philanthropy to keep critics at bay.

[Read more on The Conversation.](#)



# EUROPEAN DEMOGRAPHIC DATA 2018



Credit: Speedeon

The European Demographic Data Sheet 2018 reviews, explores and visualizes recent population trends in 45 European countries. The data sheet also provides a snapshot of the current research at the Wittgenstein Centre for Demography and Global Human Capital on changes in education composition and labour force, measuring economic dependency, assessing healthy life years, and estimating fertility.

The datasheet combines data for all countries of Europe and the European Union, Japan and the USA, and features maps, population pyramids, tables, graphs and special thematic boxes on, among others, the tempo effect and adjusted indicators of total fertility, the contribution of migration and natural population change to long-term population growth in Europe.

The online version of the data sheet 2018, available at [www.populationeurope.org](http://www.populationeurope.org), is optimized for mobile devices and provides expanded data coverage, additional maps and population pyramids, ranking charts and details about data sources and definitions. It also allows the users to download all the data.

[Read more on International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis.](#)

## WHAT ARE “PREDATORY” ACADEMIC JOURNALS?



Credit: Medical Dialogues

To get ahead in academia, not much beats publishing lots of papers that have been vetted by independent experts, a process of quality control known as peer review. In recent years, however, this practice of appraising researchers by counting their publications has become problematic. This is because an astonishing number of journals that bill themselves as “peer-reviewed” do not, in fact, take the trouble to be so. A tally of journals that an American analytics firm, Cabells, believes to falsely claim to peer-review submissions, amounted to 8,699—more than double the number of a year ago. A blacklist compiled by other experts is even longer.

Fuelling the boom is a change in the way many journals make money. In the past decade or so, many have ceased selling subscriptions. Instead, they now charge authors to publish their papers. This “open-access” business model allows anyone to read papers online for free, but there’s a big drawback. A journal that need not induce readers to pay can publish rubbish, as long as authors will pay for the presumed prestige. The result has been a flood of “atrocious” papers, note researchers at the Ottawa Hospital Research Institute, who last year completed a study of 3,702 biomedical articles from 185 suspect publishers.

[Read more on The Economist.](#)

Dr. Jocalyn Clark  
Executive Editor, The Lancet  
'Value Laden Medical Journalism'  
Sickkids Global Health, Toronto  
July 24, 2018



Credit: David Zakus

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Publisher and Editor: Dr. David Zakus  
david.zakus@utoronto.ca

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