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By Alison McCook

Life After Fraud

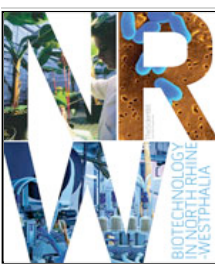
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Each year, the U.S. Office of Research Integrity (ORI) investigates dozens of charges of scientific misconduct. And each year, the ORI adds a handful of names to a list of researchers found guilty of falsifying figures, fabricating data, or committing other academic infractions. As of April 1, 2009, this Administrative Actions list, presented on the ORI Web site, carried 38 names. These people are barred from receiving federal funds and/or serving on a Public Health Service committee, typically for a period of 3-5 years. Once the debarment term is up, the name disappears from the list. In theory, the punishment—and the shame—of the ordeal is over.

However, any time the ORI makes a formal ruling of misconduct, that information ends up on the Internet. The ORI's newsletter and annual reports, which used to be hard copies sent to federally funded schools, are now all electronic. The NIH Guide, a weekly report that lists findings of misconduct to help grant reviewers flag scientists who apply for federal funds before their exclusion period is over, is online, too. And the Federal Register, the official publication of every federal agency, is available as a daily email digest. So Google anyone's name who has ever been penalized by the ORI, and even if their debarment was lifted more than a decade ago, even if they signed a document stating they accepted the ORI's decision well before the Internet became such a staple of daily life, the description of the finding against them—and the penalty they received—will pop up. In some cases, it's the first article that appears.

Of the hundreds who faced federal reprimands in the last 20 years, three agreed to speak to *The Scientist* about their experience. All spoke on the condition that the story would not include their real names. Doing so, of course, would only create one more unpleasant entry in what comes up when you enter their names into an online search engine.

IT WAS THE DEADLINE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT DECISION MOLECULAR biologist

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The charges were relatively minor. It all came down to company data Page had included in a grant application that he says he believed he had permission to use, but the company says he didn't. A couple of oversights on Page's part led to accusations of plagiarism, falsification of qualifications, and breach of confidentiality. He didn't mind having to take a class on misconduct, withdrawing his application for early tenure, and writing letters of apology to some of the people involved. But even after several months of an emotional investigation, during which he hadn't been sleeping well and his relationship with his fiancée had been deteriorating, he just wasn't sure he was willing to admit guilt to something he says wasn't true.

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"So I came into work on the deadline day still not knowing what to do," Page recalls. "I turned on my computer, and a plane hit the World Trade Center. And then another plane hit the World Trade Center. And then another plane hits the Pentagon." It was the morning of September 11, 2001. When he realized the enormity of what was happening, his concerns about signing the paperwork melted away. "I realized there were a lot bigger things in the world." He signed a declaration of guilt, and handed it over to OSU officials that day. The school passed on its findings to the ORI. Eventually, the ORI added Page to its Administrative Actions list.

In 2007, the ORI received 222 allegations of misconduct, opened 14 new cases of misconduct, and closed another 28. Ten of those closed cases resulted in findings of misconduct and/or administrative actions.

Once he signed the document, Page told his department what had happened, met one-on-one with 14 faculty members with whom he had close research collaborations, and explained the situation to his graduate students. "I'd like it to go away, but I haven't tried to hide from it," he says. For the most part, people accepted his side of the story. "The people that work close to me, most of them patted me on the back and said 'we trust you.'" Others were less sympathetic. One faculty member, who works across the hall from Page, still believes he is a liar and a cheat, Page says. Page never shared his story with anyone in his family, out of embarrassment. To this day, he doesn't know if they know about it.

The story began while Page was researching a steroid hormone that appeared to improve the immune response to viral and bacterial infections. A startup company, which we'll call Vaxeen (the real company did not respond to requests for comment), approached him to see if he could provide a wet research lab to do pharmaceutical work in animals, to test the hormone's ability to boost vaccine efficacy. Page agreed, and signed a contract that guaranteed him \$280,000 over 2 years in funding, with the promise of more. Page decided he wanted to do a broader project, so he began writing an NIH grant with a Vaxeen scientist (whom he declines to name). This scientist provided Page with some preliminary data from the company, which Page added to the application without attribution, since the Vaxeen scientist would be represented in the list of coauthors.

Just days before Page planned to submit the grant, however, the Vaxeen scientist told him that the company did not want his name on the application. Page took him off the author list, but forgot to remove the company's results from the preliminary data section. "Absolutely, if I had thought of it, I would have put [that data] in the background of the grant, and attributed it to the company," he says. "Rarely a week goes by where I don't think about this."

Over time, Page pieced together what happened next. A reviewer of his grant who had also worked with Vaxeen (and declined to be named in this story) recognized the data, recused himself from the review, then likely contacted the company (the reviewer can't recall if he contacted Vaxeen or not). However the company found out, it then asked Page for a copy of his written permission to use the data. Page said he thought he had

Many allegations to the ORI involve "honest differences in interpretations or judgments of data," that the agency does not consider misconduct. Similarly, the ORI does not investigate authorship or credit disputes between former collaborators, even if the complainants describe them as plagiarism.

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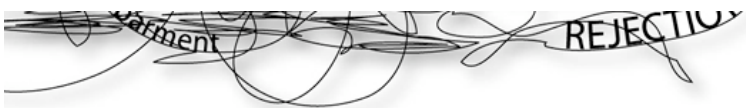
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received permission from his collaborator, without needing a written agreement. "Absolutely, I was caught," he says. OSU investigated—going through his files, computer hard drive, and all communications with the company—and concluded that Page "had committed scientific misconduct under federal and university guidelines," according to a university statement issued at the time. (An OSU spokesperson declined to comment further on the case.) Page thought about leaving OSU, but his colleagues—who largely supported him and believed he didn't intend to mislead—convinced him to stay. "If it wasn't for them, I would have quit," he says. "I'd be teaching at a college."

One year after Page signed the paperwork on that fateful day, he received tenure. Since that time, he has published 35 papers and accumulated a lifetime total of more than 1,200 citations. He now receives more requests to review papers and grants than he did before the incident occurred. For him, the hardest part is meeting other researchers and asking himself: do they know? "When they hear my name, do they go, 'Oh, I know you already.' Do they have a preconceived notion about me? When I interact with people at study sections or when I interact with people at scientific meetings, do they already know who I am before I know them?"



GERRY LEVICK FIRST REALIZED THE GRAVITY OF A DECISION

he'd made 4 years earlier while being cross-examined in a 1998 trial. As a researcher in human performance and consciousness at Touro College in New York, Levick occasionally testifies as a forensic consultant in court cases—in this one, he spoke about whether he believed a driver was paying attention when a car accident occurred.

While being cross-examined, the lawyer asked him if he had ever been found guilty of scientific misconduct. He said no. Had he ever been censured by a professional organization? No. Had he ever been found guilty of misconduct by a professional organization? No again. Then came the most direct question: Had he ever been convicted of professional misconduct by the National Institutes of Health? "And then it hit me. I said, 'Oh my God.'" The attorney immediately presented official documents showing that, in 1994, Levick had agreed to be penalized for misrepresenting his qualifications and expertise on a grant application. Levick had signed a document, but had never admitted guilt, and he believed that the penalty period had expired in 1997.

The judge cleared the jury from the room, and told Levick he could not continue his testimony. Levick stepped down from the witness stand, embarrassed and perplexed. How had the lawyer found out about something that ended a year ago? "I couldn't figure out what had happened, where this came from. I didn't realize it was in the public domain."

The charges stemmed from the wording Levick used on an NIH training grant application he submitted in 1988, when he was 39. He no longer has the original application, and sometimes struggles to remember exactly what he wrote. First, the agency alleges he claimed he had an MD degree from the University of Manchester—Levick admits that he wrote that on his application, but his real degree was an MBChB, a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery that, in the United Kingdom, represents a combined undergraduate and graduate degree that serves as the initial step students take who want to become doctors. (Levick eventually obtained an MD from a university in Sri Lanka.) He says he wanted to simplify the process since this type of degree doesn't exist in the United States. Second, Levick said he was based at Harvard Medical School (HMS), when his real affiliation was, according to Levick, "the Child Study Unit" at Children's Hospital Boston, a teaching hospital of HMS. His funding, he says, came from the Research Foundation of Harvard University. When describing his role at Harvard, "I think I said that I was, uh, associated. I think the word was associated, or a fellow. I actually don't remember." (A Harvard Medical School spokesperson confessed that there are many groups associated with Harvard, but he had never heard of the Research Foundation.) The final charge is that he falsely claimed to have 13 patents—Levick says he wrote 13 patents "and technologies," representing new tools modeled on older inventions.

"I'm angry as hell. And there's "They were looking to see if the t's were crossed, the i's were dotted. And

nothing whatsoever I can do about it."

admittedly sometimes they weren't," he says. "Maybe I wasn't careful enough, maybe I was. But the sum and substance of this stuff has no merit."

"They" in his story represents investigators at the New York Chiropractic College (NYCC), where Levick was affiliated between 1986 and 1990, then based in Long Island. As a member of the board of trustees, Levick says he was privy to heated discussions about the college's decision to move its central campus upstate (a move that ultimately took place), and he suspects that board members decided to investigate him as a way to muscle him out. The college found some discrepancies on the grant application (which was never funded) and passed its conclusions on to the ORI. Given how long ago the events took place, an NYCC spokesperson could only confirm the dates of Levick's appointment, and had no details about the investigation.

In 1994, Levick received a letter from the ORI saying he was being accused of misconduct. It rattled him. "I'm a really strong character, but I was probably nonfunctional for a couple of days. All the blood drained out of the upper portion of my body. I felt pretty helpless." He consulted an attorney, who said that fighting the case would cost \$150,000. Levick was in the midst of a divorce, already \$120,000 in debt to attorneys. He contacted the ORI. "They said 'well, we can make you an offer.'" If he signed a voluntary exclusion agreement, he would forego federal funds for 3 years, ending in 1997. "And I said, 'and that's the end of that?' They said 'yeah.'" I did ask them whether this would appear anywhere. And they said 'no.' And I said 'okay.'"

On average, an ORI investigation takes 19 months overall to conclude. Around one-third of researchers investigated for misconduct by the ORI are eventually found guilty. Of the 10 findings of misconduct in 2007—all of which involved falsification or fabrication of data—seven scientists were barred from receiving federal funds. Two scientists were barred for 5 years; one was barred for life.

Fifteen years later, sitting in his tiny, windowless Long Island office at Touro College on one of the first sunny spring days of the year, surrounded by richly colored paintings and drawings that cover every wall, Levick catalogues the impact that decision has had on his life.

He estimates that he has applied to hundreds of institutions, none of which hired him. He says he has published more than 300 academic papers, and comes with millions in funding—student tuition (he works with 13 PhD students), a \$650,000 yearly contract for 12 years from the F. R. Carrick Institute, as well as grants over the years from state and federal agencies. Just this past winter, he received an offer of full professor from a university in Israel (he declined to name which one), along with money for travel and to build a lab. "I told them this story, because I wanted there to be no chance of there being a problem. They said 'we're going to investigate,' etcetera. And they did." The faculty

senate cleared him, but the president of the university reneged on the offer. "I felt like shit warmed over," Levick says. "It was really painful."

Once he realized that his misconduct was on the Web for all to see, he wrote to then-head of the NIH, Elias Zerhouni, asking if he could take down the information, considering that he was "unemployable as a result." One month later, Levick received an email from a representative from the NIH's Office of the Director. It simply said:

You recently contacted Dr. Zerhouni via e-mail concerning the voluntary exclusion you signed ten years ago. Your concern relates to access to this information on the web. I assume that you refer to the citation in the [date omitted] NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts. If so, please understand that this is a publication and therefore is not subject to redacting. In addition, it is clear from the announcement that the exclusion was for a term of three years and is no longer in effect.

If you type his full name into Google, the first article that appears is the notice of misconduct. (In part because of that, Levick now publishes mostly under "Gerry," not "Gerald.") The night he and I met

ORI's Response

John Dahlberg, director of the division of investigative oversight at the ORI, did not speak about any of these particular

in his office, Levick flew to Israel to deliver a lecture and discuss more details about another offer he just received from a "major university" there. His contract at Touro ends June 30, and he has nothing lined up. Again, that offer from the Israeli university fell through at the 11th hour—the result, Levick believes, of the public information about his voluntary exclusion agreement, which ended 12 years ago. "I'm angry as hell," he says. "And there's nothing whatsoever I can do about it."

AFTER HIS WIFE DIED 3½ YEARS

ago, John Franklin, 67, started dating again. On a first date, a woman asked him about something she'd found on Google. As of this spring, if you put his (real) name into the search engine, the eighth entry is a 1990 news article about concerns that a blood test to detect cancer that Franklin developed didn't perform as he claimed. Six entries below that is the NIH Guide's entry about Franklin. It stated that he fudged data in a grant application to show that the test was more accurate, sensitive, and specific than it was. He was barred from federal funding for 3 years.

Franklin explained to the woman that he, in fact, was the person in those articles. Had he known that the details would be so permanently fixed on the Internet, however, he says he never would have signed the document accepting the ORI's ruling of misconduct. But it was the mid-1990s, before the Web became such a fixture itself.

Franklin doesn't dwell on the details of his case or replay the decisions he made. Much of it he can no longer remember, though he does recall contacting the ORI once he realized his case was so prominent and permanent. "I called up the NIH and said it's supposed to be taken down [after three years, after the penalty was up]," he says. "If they say [the record] is going to be expunged in three years, it should be," Franklin says.

The problems began for him while he was an associate professor at Harvard Medical School, working on a technology to diagnose cancer from blood plasma. He found that nuclear magnetic resonance (NMR) scans of blood lipids appeared to spot tumors before X-rays, and months or years before people showed clinical signs. Franklin published his findings in the *New England Journal of Medicine*; however, soon after, the journal published research by independent groups that were unable to confirm his results.

Franklin says that elevated levels of blood fat or improper handling or preparation of samples can influence NMR scans and lead to false results. Franklin was consistently able to make the diagnostic work, and he denies ever fudging any data along the way to improve its performance. However, a company that licensed the technology based on Franklin's initial data failed to show in its own research that the technique worked.

cases, but acknowledges that having an official record of misconduct is a "heavy burden." However, the ORI has no control over the NIH Guide or the Federal Register, and can't take down its annual reports when they contain notices that have expired, he says. The agency does remove the names from the Administrative Actions listing once the penalty period is up, Dahlberg notes, because that information typically comes up very quickly in an online search. Still, he adds, there is a public benefit to making misconduct findings public, and easily retrievable. For every case of misconduct the ORI catches, there are many more the agency misses, Dahlberg says, and announcing every guilty finding sends a message. "It's creating a deterrent effect. When we publicize findings of misconduct, it makes people more aware of the consequences of their actions." But to the scientists at the heart of misconduct findings who want to continue their careers, the public benefit offers little consolation, he adds. "There's collateral damage. I regret it."

"I probably wouldn't have signed [the exclusion agreement] had I known it would come up on the internet 10 years later."

In the midst of all that, one Sunday in October 1993, on his way to church, Franklin began feeling chest pains. He went to the doctor and learned that his cholesterol had spiked as a result of stress, and caused an almost total occlusion of a coronary artery. "It was while I was in the hospital that the clinical trial

results [from the company] came in. And they were terrible."

After the negative results, the company had to fold. It sued Franklin and Beth Israel Hospital, where Franklin was working; a sheriff came to Franklin's house on a weekend to serve him papers; and the school launched an investigation, consisting of two informal 1-hour meetings with a committee of administrators and professors.

Between 1992 and 2001, an average of 1 in 70 institutions reported investigating misconduct each year, according to a 2004 ORI report. Of these institutions, 55% reported only one suspected misconduct, 29% reported between two and five cases of suspected misconduct, and the rest reported between six and 20 cases.

Before HMS could make a ruling, Franklin left voluntarily. He had lost his funding from the company when it went under, and "I figured, with a heart attack and everything, I needed a change of life." HMS's official statement noted that the school investigated the allegations but Franklin resigned "prior to the completion of the institutional proceedings." The *NEJM* never corrected, retracted, nor issued an expression of concern about Franklin's paper.

Eventually, Franklin received a letter from the ORI saying it was conducting its own hearing about his NMR data, inviting him to attend and defend himself. Franklin says he could not bring the data with him, though, as Beth Israel was holding onto it due to the ongoing lawsuit with the company, so he didn't attend. Then, when he

received a letter about the agency's concerns related to a grant application about NMR, "I wasn't surprised." Even though he says he did nothing wrong, he signed the letter, essentially accepting the agency's ruling and penalty. "I did believe then that the public record would be expunged in three years," he says. "I probably wouldn't have signed if I had known it would come up on the Internet 10 years later."

In the mid-1990s, at the age of 54, Franklin set up a new lab in his kitchen. With a hotplate, a stirrer, and funds from his retirement account, he began experimenting with new ways of delivering drugs topically through the skin. His first target was arginine, an amino acid that the body converts to nitric oxide, which boosts blood flow. (His wife always complained of cold hands.) Franklin found that if he added salt to a charged compound like arginine, the salt helped push the compound into the tissue. Tweaking the pH and changing the ratio of water and fat in the cream made things even easier. A pilot study published in *Diabetes Care* showed that the cream raised foot temperatures in 13 diabetics (who are prone to circulation problems) by several degrees, and improved blood flow.

Sitting at the head of a shiny cherry-colored table in his new office this past spring, Franklin crosses his legs and describes his life since the ORI's ruling. It's the day of the Boston Marathon, so the streets of Cambridge are unusually quiet outside the window of the small office park. Behind him hang four framed patents, all related to the new transdermal technology. His new company, which he does not want named, now makes up to \$1 million each year in mail order sales of the "warming cream" and other topical deliveries of arginine. He has a list of 100 drugs he'd like to develop, funding from "rich private investors" (whom he won't disclose), is in talks with four companies to license the technology, and is at work on an investigational new drug application for topical ibuprofen to treat knee pain, which he'll submit to the FDA this summer. "I don't think I'll ever retire for real," he says.

Misconduct cases appeared to cluster in the upper echelon of institutions. Between 1992 and 2001, the top 75 institutions (ranked by NIH funding out of a pool of more than 2600) represented 29% of the institutions that investigated misconduct. Only one of the top 50 institutions did not report any possible cases of misconduct during that 10-year period.

As for the woman he confessed his story to on their first date, she eventually married him.

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comment:

life after fraud for Hwang Woo-Suk

by null null

[Comment posted 2009-07-29 04:41:58]

Since being indicted for fraud in March 2006 in one of the most famous cases of scientific fraud, you'd expect Hwang Woo-Suk to lose momentum. He would lose his liberty if he stole from a convenience store.

Here are some recent papers

Cloning missy: obtaining multiple offspring of a specific canine genotype by somatic cell nuclear transfer.

Hossein MS, Jeong YW, Park SW, Kim JJ, Lee E, Ko KH, Kim HS, Kim YW, Hyun SH, Shin T, Hawthorne L, Hwang WS.

Cloning Stem Cells. 2009 Mar;11(1):123-30.

Birth of Beagle dogs by somatic cell nuclear transfer.

Hossein MS, Jeong YW, Park SW, Kim JJ, Lee E, Ko KH, Hyuk P, Hoon SS, Kim YW, Hyun SH, Shin T, Hwang WS.

Anim Reprod Sci. 2009 Sep;114(4):404-14. Epub 2008 Oct 22.

PMID: 19059739 [PubMed - in process]

Production of cloned dogs by decreasing the interval between fusion and activation during somatic cell nuclear transfer.

Kim S, Park SW, Hossein MS, Jeong YW, Kim JJ, Lee E, Kim YW, Hyun SH, Shin T, Hwang WS.

Mol Reprod Dev. 2009 May;76(5):483-9.

PMID: 18951374 [PubMed - in process]

Protocol for the recovery of in vivo matured canine oocytes based on once daily measurement of serum progesterone.

Hossein MS, Jeong YW, Kim S, Kim JJ, Park SW, Jeong CS, Hyun SH, Hwang WS.

Cloning Stem Cells. 2008 Sep;10(3):403-8.

Anti-apoptotic effect of melatonin on preimplantation development of porcine parthenogenetic embryos.

Choi J, Park SM, Lee E, Kim JH, Jeong YI, Lee JY, Park SW, Kim HS, Hossein MS, Jeong YW, Kim S, Hyun SH, Hwang WS.

Mol Reprod Dev. 2008 Jul;75(7):1127-35

The analysis of chromatin remodeling and the staining for DNA methylation and histone acetylation do not provide definitive indicators of the developmental ability of inter-species cloned embryos.

Lee E, Kim JH, Park SM, Jeong YI, Lee JY, Park SW, Choi J, Kim HS, Jeong YW, Kim S, Hyun SH,

Hwang WS.

Anim Reprod Sci. 2008 May;105(3-4):438-50. Epub 2008 Jan 3.

Characterization of porcine growth differentiation factor-9 and its expression in oocyte maturation.

Lee GS, Kim HS, Hwang WS, Hyun SH.

Mol Reprod Dev. 2008 May;75(5):707-14.

Beneficial effects of brain-derived neurotropic factor on in vitro maturation of porcine oocytes.

Lee E, Jeong YI, Park SM, Lee JY, Kim JH, Park SW, Hossein MS, Jeong YW, Kim S, Hyun SH, Hwang WS.

Reproduction. 2007 Sep;134(3):405-14.

Effects of thiol compounds on in vitro maturation of canine oocytes collected from different reproductive stages.

Hossein MS, Kim MK, Jang G, Oh HJ, Koo O, Kim JJ, Kang SK, Lee BC, Hwang WS.

Mol Reprod Dev. 2007 Sep;74(9):1213-20.

Effects of insulin-transferrin-selenium in defined and porcine follicular fluid supplemented IVM media on porcine IVF and SCNT embryo production.

Jeong YW, Hossein MS, Bhandari DP, Kim YW, Kim JH, Park SW, Lee E, Park SM, Jeong YI, Lee JY, Kim S, Hwang WS.

Anim Reprod Sci. 2008 Jun;106(1-2):13-24. Epub 2007 Mar 30.

11: Endangered wolves cloned from adult somatic cells.

Kim MK, Jang G, Oh HJ, Yuda F, Kim HJ, Hwang WS, Hossein MS, Kim JJ, Shin NS, Kang SK, Lee BC.

Cloning Stem Cells. 2007 Spring;9(1):130-7. Erratum in: Cloning Stem Cells. 2007 Autumn;9(3):450.

Production of blastocysts after intergeneric nuclear transfer of goral (*Naemorhedus goral*) somatic cells into bovine oocytes.

Oh BC, Kim JT, Shin NS, Kwon SW, Kang SK, Lee BC, Hwang WS.

J Vet Med Sci. 2006 Nov;68(11):1167-71

14: Improved in vitro bovine embryo development and increased efficiency in producing viable calves using defined media.

Lim KT, Jang G, Ko KH, Lee WW, Park HJ, Kim JJ, Lee SH, Hwang WS, Lee BC, Kang SK.

Theriogenology. 2007 Jan 15;67(2):293-302. Epub 2006 Sep 15.

PMID: 16979228 [PubMed - indexed for MEDLINE]

Related Articles

15: Analysis of nuclear reprogramming in cloned miniature pig embryos by expression of Oct-4 and Oct-4 related genes.

Lee E, Lee SH, Kim S, Jeong YW, Kim JH, Koo OJ, Park SM, Hashem MA, Hossein MS, Son HY, Lee CK, Hwang WS, Kang SK, Lee BC.

Biochem Biophys Res Commun. 2006 Oct 6;348(4):1419-28. Epub 2006 Aug 10.

PMID: 16920069 [PubMed - indexed for MEDLINE]

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Kim S, Lee SH, Kim JH, Jeong YW, Hashem MA, Koo OJ, Park SM, Lee EG, Hossein MS, Kang SK, Lee BC, Hwang WS.

Mol Reprod Dev. 2006 Dec;73(12):1523-30.

PMID: 16894543 [PubMed - indexed for MEDLINE]

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17: Antiapoptotic and embryotrophic effects of alpha-tocopherol and L-ascorbic acid on porcine embryos derived from in vitro fertilization and somatic cell nuclear transfer.

Jeong YW, Park SW, Hossein MS, Kim S, Kim JH, Lee SH, Kang SK, Lee BC, Hwang WS.

Theriogenology. 2006 Dec;66(9):2104-12. Epub 2006 Jul 3

18: Temporal effects of alpha-tocopherol and L-ascorbic acid on in vitro fertilized porcine embryo

development.

Hossein MS, Hashem MA, Jeong YW, Lee MS, Kim S, Kim JH, Koo OJ, Park SM, Lee EG, Park SW, Kang SK, Lee BC, Hwang WS.

Anim Reprod Sci. 2007 Jul;100(1-2):107-17. Epub 2006 Jul 24.

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comment:

Is difference in interpretation unavoidable?

by anonymous poster

[Comment posted 2009-07-24 06:23:32]

This article also has other interesting information from ORI (office of research integrity). It is amazing to note that in the year 2007, 222 allegations have been made. Further, many of the allegations involve ?honest difference in interpretation or judgment?.

Needless to say science is about facts and reasoning. The finding of any scientific research is supposed to lead to clarity rather than ambiguity. Difference in interpretation means that what a scientist, for example, means by showing a scientific data may apparently give yet different information, and such different information might be potentially wrong. Therefore, publication of scientific data which gives rise to serious difference in interpretation has the potential to mislead scientific community especially the young students in the field. In the modern science of this 21st century, I wonder, why such ambiguous research in biological science have become so rampant leading to so many allegations of scientific misconduct.

Difference in interpretation also paves the way for innocent misinterpretation, misunderstanding and controversies. This issue reminds me of a very interesting example which I would like to share with other readers. This is about a paper entitled: Estrogen receptor-alpha binds p53 tumor suppressor protein directly and represses its function (J Biol Chem : 2006 Apr 14;281(15):9837-40). If one reads this paper, he/she may understand that activation of PCNA gene by p53, like p21 gene, is repressed by ER-alpha. If this is the understanding or interpretation, she/he is terribly wrong. Because, PCNA is activated by p53 only upon genomic damage. Since genomic damage by ionizing radiation causes ER-alpha - p53 complex to dissociate, p53 mediated activation of PCNA gene is not repressed. Only activation of PCNA is possible. Such activation was shown by the same group in MCF-7 cells in an earlier paper (see Figure 3 in Oncogene. 2002 Oct 17;21(47):7226-9.)

This example raises the question whether such difference in interpretation in 21st century science is unavoidable. And, why some scientists deliberately give room for such difference in interpretation? I will leave it for other readers to judge.

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comment:

Life after reporting scientific misconduct

by anonymous poster

[Comment posted 2009-07-15 14:45:43]

How prevalent are scientific fraud nowadays? Do you believe that there are mass research midconducts in a specific scientific field?

The reason why scientific fraud is so prevalent in America is that most of the scientific fraudsters are not punished and almost all people who report the fraud were seriously retaliated against for their whistle blowing.

Help needed to fight with research misconduct?

I worked in one of the most prestigious institutes in Boston and the world. In the work, I could not be able to recapitulate and develop a major story in the polycystic kidney disease field. Later I found out that some of the important data that were published and used by the laboratory to apply for NIH grants were falsified and fabricated. Astoundingly, my findings also indicated that several top laboratories in the field are probably involving in fabrication and/or falsification of scientific data. I presented the evidences and made complaints to the principle investigator of the laboratory and later the officials in the institute. However, I was retaliated against for my whistle blowing and was asked to leave my position. I have made research misconduct allegation and retaliation allegation in Office of Research Integrity in US Department of Health and Human Services.

Unfortunately, ORI only asked the institute set up self-investigation panels for both issues. After my complaining, the institute egregiously engaged in the retaliation and threatening, attempting to intimidate me. After an extremely unfair investigation, the institute terminated my position before the investigation to research misconduct actually started, releasing a clear signal to the people of research misconduct that the institute is helping them cover up their wrongdoings. If the research misconduct is covered up, millions dollars of taxpayers' money could be in danger of being wasted, the public health could be in danger of unprotected, and the truth might be buried by the lies.

Therefore, I am seeking for urgent assistance from anyone who will be able to give me a hand on this matter. My question is, how do we expose their misconducts in an effective way? I have tried to write to the journal, and my comments were largely ignored.

I would like to remind my fellow whistle blowers. My lesson is, in no case, should you go to the officer of research integrity within the institute by your own. Otherwise, you would be squeezed

like a bug by the officer of research integrity.

Your kind assistance and/or information will be highly appreciated by all honest and hard-working scientists.

If you are interested in knowing the specific story, please contact me at lincbacon@yahoo.com.

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comment:

What about citation plagiarism ?

by anonymous poster

[Comment posted 2009-07-14 16:43:03]

What about citation plagiarism, falsely claiming undue discovery credit. This is arguably the most common kind of misconduct and one that seems to go entirely uninvestigated.

On turning down the Craaford prize in mathematics, Alexandre Grothendieck stated:

" In the two decades that have intervened the ethical standards of the sciences (certainly in mathematics) have been degraded to such an extent that the most bare-faced plagiarism between colleagues (often at the expense of those who can't defend themselves), seems to have become the norm. At least it is generally tolerated, even in exceptionally flagrant instances. .

Given this situation, were I to agree to enter into the game of prizes and rewards, it would be equivalent to my giving stamp of approval to a state of affairs in today's sciences that I see as being profoundly unhealthy. Their spiritual state, even their intellectual and material states, are nothing less than suicidal, hence they are destined to vanish in the near future..."

<http://www.fermentmagazine.org/Quest88.html>

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comment:

to Davo

by ed goodwin

[Comment posted 2009-07-08 09:57:01]

I don't know who you hang with, but 98% of the people I have known in my life are honest decent people who would not even think of committing misconduct. You either need to hang with a different crowd or take a close look at your view of the world. We should and can expect that researchers using our tax dollars (which is what ORI polices) be held to the highest standards of ethics. There is simply no other way to view this matter!

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comment:

scientists on steroids?

by davo senders

[Comment posted 2009-07-07 22:15:05]

So much to write - and so little will be understood -
So I will quote Jesus.

"Let the person among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."
Who really is ethically clean?

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comment:

World's smallest violin

by Anne Gardner

[Comment posted 2009-07-07 11:36:58]

Wow, I couldn't even thoroughly read this article I was so disgusted. First of all, names changed? These people admitted guilt. If they are unwilling to go on record under their real names, then no article. Second, the penalties and charges just disappear after an amount of time? Criminals don't get their convictions erased. If you feel that you are not guilty, don't sign the paper. Fight the charges. Your examples specialize in taking the "easy" way out-- enhance data or credentials; whine how unfair it is that signing a little paper left a black mark after their name. Why doesn't the Scientist write an article about people who are successful in nonscientific endeavors after being found guilty of fraud? Maybe that would encourage people who are tempted to commit fraud to leave science before it happens. I am reminded of a passage in CP Snow's "The Search" that went something like, If we allow scientists to commit errors, even unintentionally, we open the door to errors committed intentionally. Looks like we've gone way beyond that. No wonder the number of high impact papers being retracted has increased lately.

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comment:

Look at the facts before believing perpetrators' tales

by Alan Price

[Comment posted 2009-07-06 09:06:26]

I recommend that the writer and the readers look at the facts in these cases -- which are available online through the "NIH Guide" as the writer indicated (and readily searchable in Google under "misconduct" using just the "name of the institution" given by the writer and "ORI") -- before believing the tales that two of three convicted respondents told the her for this story.

While "GL" told her that "he struggles to remember exactly what he wrote," the 1994 NIH Guide described the NYCC and ORI findings of fact: he lied in a grant application about having an M.D.,? an appointment as a "professor at Harvard," and "13 patents" -- he did not have them.

Likewise "JF" told her "he did nothing wrong," but the Harvard and ORI reports proved as noted in the 1996 NIH Guide that he massively falsified NMR data on patients' blood.

"GL" also claimed to her: "I did ask them [ORI] whether this would appear anyplace. And they said 'no.'" -- this is clearly false, as everyone in ORI knew that ORI had published its findings since 1993 in The NIH Guide, The Federal Register, and the ORI Annual Reports -- and now on the ORI website.

Once the term of administrative action expires, the findings are removed from the ORI website administrative actions listing; but as indicated by the writer, they remain in the other named federal publications. Of course, the detailed institutional and ORI reports with findings can also be obtained though Freedom of Information requests by person's name and institution name. One cannot depend on a guilty respondent to tell or want to recall the actual facts in such cases.

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comment:

Research records are permanent and likewise misconduct records should be

by ed goodwin

[Comment posted 2009-07-05 06:36:08]

The sole purpose of a research report should be to provide an accurate and truthful accounting of research. When other motives such as personal advancement, securing funding, commercial conflict of interest, or "publish or perish" enter, the public is being cheated. Publishing a fabricated or false report is a crime against the "body of evidence" in a given field of knowledge and misleads the public and scientific community into believing and acting based upon a false foundation. Researchers who commit these crimes know this, but place their personal motives above the best interest of the public. Therefore, knowledge of their misconduct should be as permanent as the false report that they intended to dupe the public with. There are plenty of useful jobs that don't require these moral considerations: landscaping, pumping gas, flipping hamburgers, etc. So, although researcher disciplined for misconduct, may have to move out of their chosen field to another, where their moral lapses will be more obvious and less damaging, they can always find productive work that benefits their fellow men.

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comment:

Banned for Life!

by anonymous poster

[Comment posted 2009-07-04 16:13:44]

The penalties are too week. The guilty should be banned for life.

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comment:

Just say no

by anonymous poster

[Comment posted 2009-07-03 02:28:44]

Sounds to me like the take home lesson is, sign nothing.

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comment:

What about titles

by Susanne Steinboeck

[Comment posted 2009-07-03 01:13:32]

I am now a bit concerned. I am a doctor of chemistry and have as an official title Dr. rer. nat. (actually Dra. rer. nat., as I am female), but in contact with Americans I tend to use PhD, as Americans normally don't understand foreign titles. Therefore I claim a title I don't have, like Gerry Levick in the story. Is this a fraud? What else should I do? My title is in latin like the whole document granting it to me. Vienna is a really old University!

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comment:

Starting over

by Phil Davis

[Comment posted 2009-07-02 22:09:20]

While certainly not defending those who willingly engage in scientific fraud, those who are punished deserve a chance to start over. If only Internet memory would fade like human memory, we could forgive, forget, and move on.

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comment:

harvard.armus@utoledo.edu

by anonymous poster

[Comment posted 2009-07-02 14:42:16]

Falsification of data is the ultimate in scientific crime. I have no sympathy for those who have committed it.

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comment:

we need ORI to include agriculture research as well

by anonymous poster

[Comment posted 2009-07-02 14:22:38]

The majority of research in agriculture is either funded by producer groups or needs the support of producer groups to gain support for government agencies. A dozen letters to the editor have been written in the Journal of Animal Science and clear testimony given that several papers published have incorrectly reported experimental treatments. There has been no resolution as all three groups - the funding source of the research - the universities and the publication board and editorial staff upon seeing irrefutable evidence - none have taken any action to correct the scientific record. Agriculture involves the food we eat and is as important and key part fo human health.

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comment:

An imposed agenda

by anonymous poster

[Comment posted 2009-07-02 12:12:37]

I feel as if these regulations are written with more interest in promotion of the idea of "intellectual property" than for the purpose of targeting those who actually fake data or publish nonexistent experiments.

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comment:

What about the study section member?

by anonymous poster

[Comment posted 2009-07-02 12:09:13]

Let me see if I get this. Somebody on an NIH study section reviewed David Page's proposal and disclosed details of it to somebody else at Vaxeen. That study section member violated the terms of service on the study section panel. David Page committed an error and paid for it, but so did that unknown person, who presumably still works and gets grants funded. Something is wrong here.

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