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Scale and Dangers of Research Fraud Highlighted

Fraud and misconduct in scientific and medical research exposes the public to health risks, misappropriates scarce funding and sows mistrust. And it may be more common than is supposed says a new paper from the Fraud Advisory Panel - *Fraud in Research: Is It New or Just Not True?*

Recent cases include a researcher claiming that long-term use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs was associated with a lower risk of oral cancer – but who based his ‘findings’ on fictitious patients. Another claimed to have cloned human embryonic stem cells but fabricated his data and pressured female staff to donate eggs (see Note to Editors 3).

Though the problem is caused by a minority of researchers the Committee of Publication Ethics (COPE) has considered 285 cases of alleged misconduct in the last 10 years and found evidence of misconduct in 77% of them. COPE heard 26 cases last year (see Note to Editors 4). A recent survey of early and mid-career scientists found that 33% had engaged in at least one questionable research practice during the last three years. 12% had overlooked others’ use of flawed data, or questionable interpretation of data (see Note to Editors 5). Problems are aggravated when corrupt ‘research’ is unwittingly used by honest scientists.

The report outlines the proceedings of an FAP conference held in May. Speakers (see Note to Editors 2) included senior staff from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE), the US Office of Research Integrity, scientific and medical journals *Nature* and *The Lancet*, and Public Concern at

Work. The Conference was chaired by Professor Sir Ian Kennedy, Emeritus Professor of Health Law, Ethics and Public Policy at University College, London.

Main types of fraud and misconduct in research include dishonestly obtaining grants; altering or adjusting results; not providing data on side-effects; failing to get the informed consent of volunteers in experiments; inventing or topping-up raw data; selective citation of research results; plagiarism; and manipulating pictures with image editing software.

Ros Wright said that “authors, journals and institutions all have a critical role to play in safeguarding the integrity of research. Prevention is better than cure and that means a zero-tolerance culture within research circles. Three main steps are required:

- open publication of, and access to, all data used in published research and papers. This allows independent verification and so provides a major deterrent. The ESRC is to be congratulated for doing just this.
- Universities must re-double efforts to emphasise the rights and wrongs of research behaviour to their students.
- True global co-operation is needed in research circles in order to foster greater integrity.”

For Further Information

- Please contact Laura Hamblin (ICAEW Press Office) on Tel: 020 7920 8617 or Email: laura.hamblin@icaew.com.
- *Fraud in Research. Is it new or just not true?*, an FAP Occasional Paper can be downloaded from www.fraudadvisorypanel.org.

Note for Editors

1. The Fraud Advisory Panel is a registered charity which raises awareness of the immense human, social and economic damage caused by fraud and helps private and public sectors, as well as the public at large, to fight back. It was established in 1998 by the Institute of

Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW) which continues to provide valuable support. Since its foundation the Panel has:

- Raised the profile of fraud helping to push the issue up the policy making agenda
- Developed major proposals for reform of policing, prosecution and the law
- Worked to improve business and professional education and training
- Commissioned important new research, for instance on the extent of fraud, cybercrime and the risk to SMEs
- Raised awareness through conferences, seminars and the media.

Members are drawn from the legal and accountancy professions, industry associations, financial institutions, government agencies, law enforcement, regulatory authorities and academia.

2. Speakers at the Conference: Dr Jane Barrett (MedicoLegal Investigations Ltd), Dr Philip Campbell (*Nature*), Guy Dehn (Public Concern at Work), Professor Ian Diamond (Economic and Social Research Council), Dr Sabine Kleinert (Committee on Publication Ethics; *The Lancet*), Professor Nicholas Steneck (US Office of Research Integrity; Professor Emeritus of History at University of Michigan), and Dr David Wright (Emeritus Reader in Microbiology at Imperial College London). All spoke in their personal capacity.
3. Full citations in *Fraud in Research: Is It New or Just Not True?*
4. Dr Sabine Kleinert in her address to the conference, 8th May 2007.
5. "Scientists Behaving Badly", *Nature* 435, 737-738 by BC Martinson, MS Anderson & R de Vries, 2005.
6. The Fraud Advisory Panel is grateful to Grant Thornton UK LLP for its sponsorship of the conference.