



So you suspect someone of fraud. What now?

An allegation of scientific misconduct, whether true or not, has serious consequences—it can disrupt a laboratory’s progress, deflate morale and even decimate careers.

First, make sure you really understand what happened. Ask a trusted colleague

to double-check your suspicions. It could be that you are unaware of certain crucial nuances. “Three people can view a situation and have three separate stories,” notes John Krueger, a scientist-investigator at the US Office of Research Integrity (ORI).

If you decide that there has been serious misconduct and wish to come forward with an allegation, build your case. You can anonymously contact the ORI or officials at your institution for help.

Finally, familiarize yourself with your institution’s policies on investigating misconduct. Each process will have a ‘point of no return’ when an investigation must go forward, so know when you cross that line. Whenever possible, report an allegation to the top university office in charge, allowing you to avoid departmental allegiances that might affect your own position.

In many cases, junior members of a lab are the most vulnerable. If you’re a graduate student, postdoc or junior faculty, find a senior scientist who is willing to be your advocate.

“The majority of people will not go forward and that is very understandable,” says Chris Pascal, director of the ORI. “Unless the misconduct puts human lives at stake, I would never say that someone must come forward. It’s a really personal decision.”

Kendall Powell, Denver

Where are they now?

Examples of fraud—real or alleged—are startlingly common, but a few cases become the stuff of folklore. What happens after the dust settles?

THEREZA IMANISHI-KARI

THE ALLEGATION: In 1986, Margot O’Toole, a postdoc in Imanishi-Kari’s Massachusetts Institute of Technology lab, accused Imanishi-Kari of falsifying data in a *Cell* paper she had coauthored with Nobel Laureate David Baltimore.



THEN: The case famously caught the attention of a Congressional panel, which in 1989 held hearings about Imanishi-Kari’s study. After a prolonged investigation, the US Office of Research Integrity recommended in 1994 that Imanishi-Kari be barred from federal research for ten years. Less famously, the ORI’s findings were overturned in 1997 and Imanishi-Kari was cleared of all charges.

Now: “Those were horrible years,” says Imanishi-Kari, now an associate professor of pathology at Tufts University. “I want to make sure that people know that I was exonerated—and that I am just like anybody else.”

LUK VAN PARIJS

THE ALLEGATION: In August 2004, postdocs in Luk Van Parijs’s Massachusetts Institute of Technology lab confronted him with faking data in various papers.

THEN: In October 2005, after a 14-month investigation, the university fired the biologist, once considered a rising star in RNA interference. The university

immediately took his website down and declines to comment on the case.

Now: The US Office of Research Integrity is investigating the allegations. In the meantime, “I am trying to rebuild a life for me and my family,” Van Parijs tells *Nature Medicine*. “This has been extremely difficult given the speculations that some of the press coverage has engendered.”

ERIC POEHLMAN

THE ALLEGATION: In December 2000, Walter deNino, a part-time lab technician at the University of Vermont, accused his boss Eric Poehlman of altering data on a long-term study on aging.

THEN: Following university and federal investigations, Poehlman, an expert on metabolic changes during menopause, admitted in March 2005 that he had made up data in 17 applications for federal grants and altered results in ten published research papers. He was fined \$180,000 and barred for life from federal funding.

Now: In a rare instance of criminal charges for fraud, Poehlman faces up to five years in prison and is awaiting a sentence by the federal court in Burlington, Vermont. He transferred to the University of Montreal until he got fired from that position in January 2005.

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