

Traditional Cancer Research of 10 Years Useless: Fraudulent Studies

Lancet's editor calls fraudulent medical research a 'scar on the moral body of science'. But it's really just part of an entire system of fraud in medicine.

by Heidi Stevenson

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Medical science is rampant with fraud. At the Mayo Clinic, ten years of research that appeared to be leading towards harnessing the immune system to fight cancer is worthless because of fraudulent studies and later research based on the fraudulent ones.

Retraction of medical research papers is at an all-time high. Though error was cited at a 3 to 1 rate over fraud, one must seriously question whether simple error is the primary reason. After all, these studies are peer-reviewed. They are supposed to have passed rigorous examination. But, what's the reality?

Of course, as Gaia Health readers have seen over and over, the reality is that flaws in much of medical research are blatant. Often, merely examining a study, instead of taking it at face value, demonstrates that the conclusions are not supported by the evidence.

Nonetheless, those same studies are cited as evidence of efficacy of drugs and procedures. Even after papers have been retracted, the impression they've given doesn't disappear. Research based on those papers is already designed and in process.

Doctors are loathe to change their practices on the basis of bad studies. Changes are made more readily as new drugs and procedures are advocated, not as old ones are discredited. Just take a look at doctors' continuing to prescribe bisphosphonates for the nonexistent disease, osteopenia (pre-osteoporosis), and hormone replacement therapy for another nonexistent disease, menopause—or even the routine prescribing of fever-reducing drugs, which is nearly always counter-productive.

Does Better Error Detection Explain the Retractions?

Some medical journals are claiming that they're better at detecting errors, implying that there really isn't an increase in fraudulent papers. That explanation simply doesn't hold up to scrutiny. They offer no explanation as to what might make them better at detecting errors now. In other words, the august journals are basing the claim on absolutely nothing but wishful thinking.

Worse, some are claiming that the advent of plagiarism software explains it. But how does finding plagiarism in papers explain fraudulent studies?

The simple fact is that they're finding more fraudulent studies because they're actually looking for them. And not as a result of their own internal reviews, but because of fraud scandals that reached mainstream media.

Why So Much Fraud in Medical Studies?

There is a tremendous amount to be gained by getting away with fraud in medical studies. The reason is simple. According to Richard Horton, editor of *The Lancet*:

A single paper in *Lancet* and you get your chair and you get your money. It's your passport to success.

It's all about money. Get published in a major medical journal and your future is made. Most peer reviewers are doing their own studies. That's what makes them peers. They want to be able to publish. Therefore, they are not particularly inclined to make more than perfunctory negative comments. Obviously, they don't want to alienate the authors of papers, since they either are or hope to become published themselves.

Peer review is a farce. The only kind of review that makes real sense is professional independent reviewers. Yet, for decades we've had peer review trotted out as the be-all and end-all in determining the legitimacy of papers. It's been unquestioned, while a little examination of the concept demonstrates that it's nearly certain to result in fraudulent work being passed as good science.

Fraud Is a Scar on Science

Richard Horton says that this fraud "is a scar on the moral body of science." That's certainly true. How many patients have been harmed? We'll likely never know, as these examples show:

Vioxx, the pain medication that causes heart attacks.

The deeply flawed statin studies that hide the adverse effects, not to mention lack of efficacy.

The antidepressant and antipsychotic studies that have hidden adverse effects and lack of efficacy, too.

The misguided studies on salt that continue to claim that lower salt intake needs to be pushed, when the opposite is probably true. In most people, there is a direct relationship between salt intake and death rates. The lower the salt intake, the greater the death rate, as demonstrated by a good study published in *JAMA*.

Even the system that's supposed to control fraud in studies before they ever reach the stage of publication is corrupt, as documented in this sting operation. The fraud is systemic, from the start of drug trials that are financed directly and indirectly by Big Pharma, to the competition among researchers hoping to make their first million, to the journals that accept the fraudulent reports, using an obviously biased system of peer review to hide behind and financed almost totally by Big Pharma ads, to the

doctors who choose to blindly accept whatever the journal reports say because it's easy, gives them cover, and also brings patients to them.

Signifying the Inherent Corruption in Conventional Medicine

Yes, this is the system of evidence that conventional medicine claims justifies its existence. Instead, it demonstrates that conventional medicine is anything but evidence-based. There is no sound basis for most of modern medicine's treatments, as should certainly be obvious with the constantly increasing rate of chronic disease.

Take a look at the advent of drug resistant diseases, which are growing rampant and often far more virulent. Or look at the false claims of disease eradication through vaccines, when any rational look at the evidence shows that it's not modern medicine we need to thank, but adequate food, good water, and good sanitation systems. Consider the advent of a new kind of whooping cough, 10 times more virulent than the old version and caused by the vaccine itself, while being blamed on the unvaccinated!

Even when there has been apparent success, we often find that it's short-lived and has presented us with worse problems than the ones apparently resolved.

We are, indeed, entering a brave new world of conventional medicine. Unfortunately, the ones who need to be brave are the patients; because they're going to need every bit of resource and resilience they can find to avoid being little more than recipients of whatever modern medicine's pseudo-science manages to spew forth.

While Dr. Horton's comment about fraudulent studies being a "scar on the moral body of science" is true, the whole truth is far more disheartening. The entire system of conventional medicine has become a scar on the psyche and soma of humans.

In a scandal that has reverberated around the world of cancer research, the Office of Research Integrity at the U.S. Department of Health found that a Boston University cancer scientist fabricated his findings. His work was published in two journals in 2009, and he's been ordered to retract them. But important studies by other scientists like those at the Mayo Clinic, who based their work on his findings, could now make 10 years of their studies worthless, according to commentary in Gaia Health.

It seems fairly evident that the cancer industrial complex is a highly lucrative, well-oiled system that tends to support funding for expensive drug treatments that don't address the cause of the problem, and have yet to make a significant dent in the decrease of the overall cancer rate in the US despite investing hundreds of billions of dollars. Much of the support comes from flawed and biased "research" studies that support the use of expensive drugs as detailed in the featured articles.

Researchers, too, are well aware of the notoriety and money to be found in cancer research ... particularly what may be deemed successful cancer research (which unfortunately is often measured by

the discovery of new drug treatments). But, as with many areas of medical research, it's important to read between the lines of "scientifically proven" studies, even those that are well accepted.

Often what you'll find is the research gives the perception of science when really it is a heavily manipulated process designed to control and deceive. Case in point, here again we have an example of widely accepted, published research that turned out to be fabricated.

10 Years of Cancer Research Down the Drain

The Office of Research Integrity (ORI) at the U.S. Department of Health reported in August 2011 that final action has been taken against Sheng Wang, PhD, of Boston University School of Medicine, Cancer Research Center. ORI states:

"The Respondent engaged in research misconduct by fabricating data that were included in two (2) published papers."

This includes:

Oncogene February 2009, which found that HIC1, a protein thought to suppress tumor growth, is a "central molecule in a novel mechanism controlling cell growth and that the disruption of this HIC1-mediated pathway may lead to abnormal cell proliferation and, ultimately, cancer."

Molecular Endocrinology December 2009, which found "reintroducing HIC1 into resistant breast cancer cells restored their sensitivity to the estrogen antagonists, indicating the existence of a novel regulatory mechanism for growth control of breast cancer cells."

Specifically, six of the eight figures in the Oncogene paper and six of the seven figures in the Molecular Endocrinology study were said to contain data from fabricated experiments. Though Wang is now required to retract the papers, and he reportedly stopped working for Boston University in July, he will only be ineligible for federal funding for 2 years.

Further, the fabricated research may continue to live on, as it has been cited by other studies and once a finding is accepted in the medical community, it's very hard to make it go away. Unfortunately, scientific retractions are actually becoming increasingly common.

As the Wall Street Journal reported:

"Just 22 retraction notices appeared in 2001, but 139 in 2006 and 339 last year. Through seven months of this year, there have been 210, according to Thomson Reuters Web of Science, an index of 11,600 peer-reviewed journals world-wide ...

At the Mayo Clinic, a decade of cancer research, partly taxpayer-funded, went down the drain when the prestigious Minnesota institution concluded that intriguing data about harnessing the immune system to fight cancer had been fabricated. Seventeen scholarly papers published in nine research journals had to be retracted. A researcher, who protests his innocence, was fired. In another major flameout, 18

research journals have said they are planning to retract a total of 89 published studies by a German anesthesiologist ..."

Fabricated Research is More Common Than You Might Think

Peer-reviewed research published in medical journals gets the golden star of approval in the media, yet many, if not most, of the findings are incredibly misleading. One of the best exposé's into this muddled system came from none other than Dr. Marcia Angell, who was the former editor-in-chief of the New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM).

In her book *The Truth about Drug Companies: How They Deceive Us and What to Do About It*, she exposed many examples of why medical studies often cannot be trusted, and said flat out:

"Trials can be rigged in a dozen ways, and it happens all the time."

For instance, in 2009 Dr. Scott Reuben, who was a well-respected, prominent anesthesiologist, former chief of acute pain of the Baystate Medical Center, Springfield, Mass. and a former professor at Tufts University's medical school, allegedly fabricated the data for 21 studies!

Dr. Reuben succeeded in getting numerous studies published, and those studies were accepted as fact and swayed the prescribing habits of doctors. It was only due to a routine audit raising a few red flags that a larger investigation was later launched.

So how did those false studies, or any studies for that matter, become worthy of being published? Part of the problem may be the peer-review process itself, as this puts researchers in charge of policing other researchers' results, and most do not want to insult a fellow researcher's work with negative comments.

As written in *Gaia Health*:

"It's all about money. Get published in a major medical journal and your future is made. Most peer reviewers are doing their own studies. That's what makes them peers. They want to be able to publish. Therefore, they are not particularly inclined to make more than perfunctory negative comments. Obviously, they don't want to alienate the authors of papers, since they either are or hope to become published themselves.

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It's almost impossible to find out what happens in the vetting process, as peer reviewers are unpaid, anonymous and unaccountable. And although the system is based on the best of intentions, it lacks consistent standards and the expertise of the reviewers can vary widely from journal to journal.

Given that cancer research is such a lucrative business right now -- the National Cancer Institute, which gave the grant money to support Dr. Sheng Wang's fabricated research, had a \$5.1 billion budget for

fiscal year 2010 -- the stakes are exceptionally high. So it stands to reason that it may be subject to even more fraud and manipulation than less lucrative research prospects.

As The Economist reported, there were more new cancer drugs in development in 2010 than any other therapeutic area. Drug makers are well aware that a blockbuster cancer drug could easily earn them profits in the billions, even if the drug is only borderline effective. It is abundantly clear that profit is a primary motive of these companies so it should not be a surprise that they have moved in this direction, and this is where the abundance of research is focused as well.

Why You Might Want to Think Twice Before Donating to Anti-Cancer Charities

A lot of people put their faith in charity organizations like the American Cancer Society (ACS), dutifully donating money to help in the "war on cancer." But in the report titled American Cancer Society—More Interested In Accumulating Wealth Than Saving Lives, Dr. Samuel S. Epstein, chairman of the Cancer Prevention Coalition, plainly lays to bare the many conflicts of interest that hamper the effectiveness of this organization.

For example, the ACS has close financial ties to both makers of mammography equipment and cancer drugs. But that's just for starters. Other conflicts of interest include ties to, and financial support from, the pesticide-, petrochemical-, biotech-, cosmetics-, and junk food industries—the very industries whose products are the primary contributors to cancer!

The ACS, along with the National Cancer Institute, virtually exclusively focus on cancer research and the diagnosis and chemical treatment of cancer. Preventive strategies, such as avoiding chemical exposures, receive virtually no consideration at all.

"Giant corporations, which profited handsomely while they polluted air, water, the workplace, and food with a wide range of carcinogens, remain greatly comforted by the silence of the ACS. This silence reflected a complex of mindsets fixated on diagnosis, treatment, and basic genetic research, together with ignorance, indifference, and even hostility to prevention. Not surprisingly, the incidence of cancer over past decades has escalated, approximately parallel to its increased funding," Dr. Epstein writes.

Many also do not realize that when you donate money to the American Cancer Society, the majority of it may never go further than the bank accounts of its numerous well-paid executives.

Meanwhile, global cancer rates have doubled in the last three decades, and their "war on cancer" strategy completely ignores, and oftentimes denies, the obvious links between cancer and toxic exposures through pesticide-laden foods, toxic personal care products, cancer-causing medical treatments and drugs, and industrial pollution. We CAN turn this trend around, but to do so the medical and research communities must stop focusing on drug treatments and overlooking the methods that can actually have a significant impact on preventing this disease.