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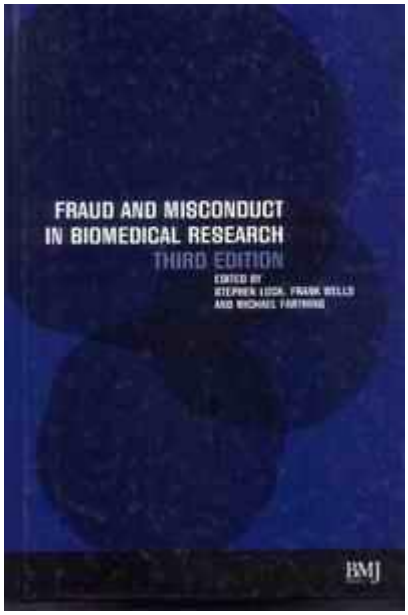
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Book Reviews: Technical Books Section

SCHOLARLY BOOK ON FRAUD OR MISCONDUCT IN BIOMEDICAL SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Fraud And Misconduct In Biomedical Research, 3rd Edition *edited by* Stephen Lock, Frank Wells and Michael Farthing, Hardcover, 6" x 9.5".
(A Book from BMJ Publishing Group)
BMJ Books, (An Imprint of the BMJ Publishing Group), BMA House, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9JR, UK. Publication Date 2001. xii + 268 pages, ISBN 0-7279-1508-8. Price £40.00 (BMA Members £38.00).

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This is a scholarly book on fraud or misconduct in biomedical scientific research. It is a comprehensive work, which deals exclusively with clinical research misconduct and recognises that - although fraud and misconduct is not rife - the fact that it occurs at all requires recognition and action.

The acid test of scientific fraud is the intention to deceive, but judging the intentions of others is rarely easy. Research misconduct may involve a range of misdemeanours from failure to get ethics committee approval, falsified patient consent and data, to falsified publications. The definition of research misconduct as defined in a Consensus Statement by the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh (Joint Consensus Conference on Misconduct in Biomedical Research 28th and 29th October 1999) is

"Behaviour by a researcher, intentional or not, that falls short of good ethical and scientific standards."

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The statement goes further to say that

"No definition can or should attempt to be exhaustive. It should allow for change. The definition should not be read as being restricted to fabrication, falsification of data and plagiarism. It is intended to cover the whole range of research misconduct."

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Another definition is *"Misconduct 'means fabrication, falsification, plagiarism or deception in proposing, carrying out or reporting results of research and deliberate, dangerous or negligent deviations from accepted practice in carrying out research. It includes failure to follow established protocols if this failure results in unreasonable risk or harm to humans, other vertebrates or the environment and facilitating of misconduct in research by collusion in, or concealment of, such actions by others'."* (MRC December 1997)

...The book is a scholarly book and at first glance might seem rather formidable but the racy style of writing makes it a good read...

This is the third edition of this book and the preface opens with the statement: *"By the time that this third edition is published, almost thirty years will have elapsed since Robert Slutsky's painted mice inaugurated the paradigm shift into the unthinkable: that misconduct might occur in scientific research."*

As the Erratum informs the reader the actual mouse painter was William T. Summerlin and not Slutsky.

For mystified readers a quick Google search would reveal the following:

"One of the major factors leading to the development of courses in research ethics has been several widely publicized cases of research misconduct. In recent years, one of the first such cases was that of William Summerlin, a scientist working at the Sloan-Kettering Institute for Cancer Research in New York. In 1974, Summerlin painted white mice with patches of black, apparently to misrepresent the animals as having accepted skin grafts from black mice (see Summerlin). Another notable case, at the San Diego campus of the University of California, is that of Robert Slutsky. In 1985, it was discovered that Slutsky, who had been publishing papers at the rate of one every ten days over a period of two years, had reported at least some experiments which were never performed (see Slutsky)."

...The present edition of this book has widened the scope from medicine to the biomedical arena as the blurbs on the back cover informs the reader and four new or revised chapters have been commissioned...

(Interested persons would find the above at http://ethics.ucsd.edu/courses/ethics/topics/overview.htm)

By the way, Slutsky was also a fraud! In 1985 Robert Slutsky resigned from the University of California at San Diego School of Medicine after colleagues began to wonder how he turned out a new research article every 10 days. Readers may find a summary of the Slutsky case on page 56 of this book and also at the following link. Robert Slutsky's Fraudulent Scientific Publication

Not much, it seems, has changed since then! This book sets to look at fraud in biomedical research and is divided into six parts.

Part I titled *Setting The Scene* does exactly that giving the reader an early look into the concept of scientific fraud.

Part II covers *The History Of Fraud And Misconduct* and generally discusses research misconduct between 1974 and 1990.

Part III is about *National Practical Issues* and Part IV covers *Ethics And Statistics*.

Part V is about *Personal Experiences* and includes the rather frightening experience of "whistleblower" David Edwards (see below).

The final part discusses *The Role Of The Editor*.

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The book, as previously mentioned, is a scholarly book and at first glance might seem rather formidable but the racy style of writing makes it a good read. The present edition of this book has widened the scope from medicine to the biomedical arena as the blurbs on the back cover inform the reader and four new or revised chapters have been commissioned.

Readers who have only a passing interest in medical research and of fraud in medical research would find Part II interesting reading. These chapters ("Research misconduct 1974-1990: an imperfect history" and "Counteracting research misconduct: a decade of British pharmaceutical industry action") discuss a number of cases including that of the "Man of Australia", William McBride of Sydney, Australia.

William McBride was among the first to describe the teratogenic effects of thalidomide on the human fetus. With the publicity and the money that he got from this he set up a private research institute. In 1982 a junior scientist challenged him about discrepancies in his research on hyoscine but got nowhere. It was to be another ten years before McBride was struck off the Medical Register.

Despite this McBride's original paper is still quoted on the web as proof of the teratogenic effects of hyoscine.

"The cases of the two doctors who died" revolves around the possible suicide of two doctors who both were responsible for research fraud in two different cases.

A case of relatively recent origin is "The case of the Scottish academic nephrologist", **Dr John Anderton** of Edinburgh who undertook research on behalf of Pfizer. The reviewer can remember when this case first unfolded.

Amongst other things Anderton cut out x-rays and ECG tracings to remove the date or the patient identification or both; purported to have seen patients on Bank Holidays when the hospital outpatient department was closed and claimed to have seen patients when he (Anderton) was on holiday.

Anderton pleaded guilty and his name was erased from the Medical Register.

These are all worrying cases but even more worrying is Part V (Personal Experiences) and in particular the case of the "whistleblower" David Edwards. Briefly, Edwards was brave enough to blow the whistle on his superior, **Dr Geoff Fairhurst**, a General Practitioner and a well loved larger than life figure in the local community, only to be ostracised by the community and suffer great mental and personal hardship. Geoff Fairhurst was found guilty and struck off by the General Medical Council on the 23rd of March 1996. (The first edition of this book appeared three years before, in 1993)

An editorial in the BMJ (BMJ 1996; 312:789-790 (30 March)) had this to say about the Fairhurst case:

"Research misconduct is back on the British agenda after yet another case last week where the General Medical Council struck off a general practitioner for forging the consent forms of patients entered into a research study sponsored by a drug company (p 798). Dr Geoffrey Fairhurst was far from being a marginal member of the profession: he was vice chairman of his local medical ethics committee. Dr Fairhurst was the 16th doctor to be found guilty of serious professional misconduct after referral by the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry since the association began actively referring such cases in 1988."

I must say that of all the cases discussed in this book I found this particular one rather disturbing.

Chapter 6 of this book: *A pharmaceutical company's approach to the threat of research fraud*, also makes good reading.

...Persons involved in biomedical research would be well advised to read this book...

In Part III of this book (*National Practical Issues*) scientific fraud and misconduct from Denmark, Finland, Norway, Germany, France and the USA are discussed. These chapters mostly deal with local regulatory bodies and safeguards.

Chapter 17 discusses the prevention of fraud and misconduct in medical research and briefly mentions the concept of Parafraud which are "practices some of which currently do not lie under the umbrella of fraud and misconduct in research".

Readers might find the following sites of interest

[Reviewer's Recommendations] *1. & The Cope (Committee on Publishing Ethics) Report 2000*

2. & Managing allegations of scientific misconduct

3. & Walter W. Stewart's Site on Scientific Misconduct (Largely American cases)
4. & A recent case from America (Feb 2004)

This book is a multi-author multi-editor work.

Of the editors most readers would know the name of Stephen Lock who was the editor of The British Medical Journal from 1975 to 1991.

Frank Wells is Director and Consultant Medical Adviser of MedicoLegal Investigations Ltd and Chairman of the Ethical Issues Committee of the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Medicine.

Michael Farthing is the Professor of Medicine at the University of Glasgow and was responsible for setting up COPE- the Committee On Publishing Ethics. Interested readers would find more about COPE on page 182 of this book.

In addition to these distinguished editors the book has input from seventeen contributors from Europe and the USA.

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As is to be expected from BMJ Books, this book is well presented with good print quality and binding.

Persons involved in drug trials and other biomedical research would be well advised to read this book.



-Gyan Fernando
Dr Gyan C. A. Fernando is the Home Office Forensic Pathologist for Devon and Cornwall, United Kingdom. Previously he was the Senior Lecturer in Forensic Pathology at the University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, Scotland.

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Updates

The case of Raj Persaud

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Top British psychiatrist on the couch for plagiarised articles

London, December 28

BRITAIN'S BEST known psychiatrist is being formally investigated by his employers amid multiple allegations of plagiarism. Raj Persaud is being investigated by a review panel from the Institute of Psychiatry, King's College and the South London and Maudsley NHS Trust after two of his articles were retracted from different publications.

The latest charge relates to a retraction published in last week's *British Medical Journal*. One of Persaud's articles, a review of a biography of social psychologist Stanley Milgram by American academic Thomas Blass, was formally withdrawn "owing to unattributed use of text from other published sources".

This followed another retraction in September of Persaud's writings in *Progress in Neurology and Psychiatry* after it appeared that substantial portions were copied from Professor Blass's work.

At the time Persaud said his failure to acknowledge his sources in the piece was due to a "cutting and pasting error". When asked about a piece he had written in the *Times Educational Supplement*, which also bore striking similarities to Prof. Blass's work, he said he didn't see the final version before it went to press, and subeditors must have taken out the quotation marks and citation at the bottom.

But a spokesman for the Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London and South London and Maudsley NHS Trust, where Persaud is a consultant psychiatrist, said: "King's College London has established formal procedures to investigate the allegations brought. We do not condone plagiarism and take these matters very seriously. The review panel has met and will continue to meet over the coming months to examine the matter."

It was not clear whether the investigation covered the two retractions or other allegations. One allegation concerns a column on Scientology's relationship to psychiatry printed in the *Independent* on June 30 this year, which appeared to borrow heavily from work by a Canadian academic who was not credited.

Guardian News Service

Raj Persaud
Borrowing words

This cutting has been taken from *Hindustant Times*, (a popular Indian daily) of December 29, 2005, two years after this review was published. Raj Persaud, a consultant psychiatrist at the Institute of Psychiatry, King's College London and South London and Maudsley NHS Trust, was caught plagiarizing as many as three different times - for submitting plagiarized articles and papers in *Times Educational supplement*, *Progress in Neurology and Psychiatry* and the prestigious *British Medical Journal*. His defences: "it was a cut and paste error"; "I didn't see the final version before it went to press"; and "perhaps the subeditors took out the quotation marks and citation at the bottom". Raj Persaud is a famous personality, so much that he finds an entry in Wikipedia. However now he finds a place of honor in Famous Plagiarists site.

Nobody knows what actually happened. Perhaps he is right; perhaps not. But it underscores a very important fact in the life of all professionals - They are very vulnerable to such charges. And when mud is thrown at someone, it does tend to stick. For details, click the cutting here to enlarge and read

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