The Darsee Case

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Background

- **Who is he?**
  - Name: Dr. John Roland Darsee
  - Occupation: Physician
  - He was considered a shining star in his field
  - In 1981 already published over 100 papers and abstracts while at Harvard and at Emory
  - Fellow in the lab of Dr. Eugene Braunwald at Brigham & Women's Hospital, Harvard Univ.

What did he do?
Fabricated data
Colleagues were suspicious of his works and reported him.

Kloner investigated and asked Darsee to show him the raw data.

Darsee agreed to show, but instead he made up data as if it were from several experiments (while the fellows and lab tech watched!)

Confronted, Darsee admitted to falsifying only this set of data, and none other
Background

- In October, 1981, the NIH questioned some data submitted by Darsee
- Coauthors weren’t aware that their names were on some of the abstracts
- Further inquiry showed that Darsee falsified data while he was an undergraduate student at Notre Dame
Darsee case

Consequences & outcomes
Darsee’s Consequences

- Lost research position at Harvard
- Stripped of NIH fellowship & serving NIH for 10 years
- Left the research field & went into training as a critical care specialist
- Emory: 8 papers, 32 abstracts withdrawn
- Harvard: 9 papers, 21 abstracts withdrawn
Outcomes for Co-Workers

- NIH required Brigham & Women’s Hospital to return $122,371 of funded money
- Dr. Braunwald’s own cardiac research was put behind
- Credible coauthors and fellow researchers who worked with Darsee were under suspicion as well
Dr. Robert Kroner & Dr. Braunwald were criticized for conducting their own investigation without informing NIH

New guidelines & standards developed

Positive Side: warned other labs of misconduct, and stressed supervision of all research
Ethical Issues and values
Basics of a System of Values

- Hippocratic oath
  - Do no harm
  - Benevolence
- Moral code of ethics
  - Most research is done with an idea in mind of what the outcome should be, an hypothesis
  - A skewed starting view based off of falsified data could corrupt the correct interpretation of data
Violated Standards

- Patients right to know/choose
  - Treatments tested thoroughly
    - Little to no harm to the patients
    - Increased well-being
  - Best options given

- Florence Nightingale Pledge
  - “I will abstain from whatever is deleterious and mischievous”
Reasons for falsification

- Death of parent
- Overload of work
- Lack of vacation
- Admiration for mentor
Recommendations:

Prevention in Darsee Case

• Darsee's supervisors at the Harvard-affiliated Cardiac Research Laboratory did not report their initial suspicions about John Darsee's work.

• Eugene Braunwald accepted Darsee's plea that this was an isolated incident. Unwilling to destroy Darsee’s career, Braunwald did not inform the NIH, a decision for which he has been criticized.
Recommendations: Prevention

• Less Pressure placed on researchers to get results and to get published
• More funding for grants
• Consequences should be made known
• More communication between co-authors
• Closer supervision of research.
• More logical and scientific criteria to evaluate quality of research ..”charismatic personality” ??
All the authors should own complete responsibility for their contributed work in the publication.

Everybody’s contribution should be unambiguously listed out in the publication.

Authorship should not be allowed without a written consent that the person agrees with the contents attributed to them and they take full responsibility of the information contained therein.

Most reputed journals have the work reviewed by an expert committee before publishing it.
Recommendations: Darsee case

- Serves as a glaring example of ways in which scientific fraud is committed.
- Points out the lacunae and loopholes that existed in the academic setup to prevent fraud and lets us think of ways to correct them.
- It serves as a valuable lesson to academicians and senior scientists on ways to prevent fraud.
- Serves as a valuable lesson indicating what fraudulent research can do to people’s careers and put them in jeopardy.
- New researchers, undergrad, and grad students would mostly directly benefit by studying this case.