The Darsee Case
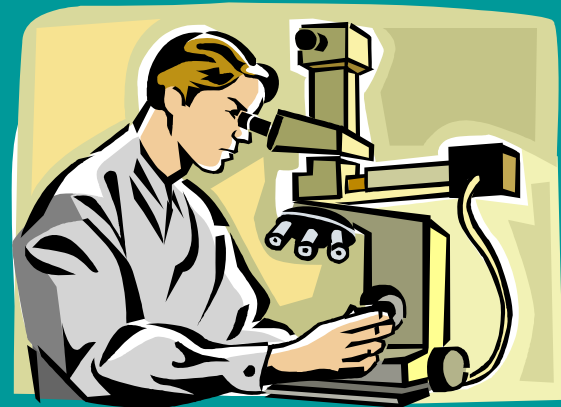

IBM – Ideal Breeding Material COLIN FIRTH

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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
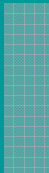- Fellow in the lab of Dr. Eugene Braunwald at Brigham & Women's Hospital, Harvard Univ.
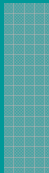
What did he do?
Fabricated data

Background

- 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
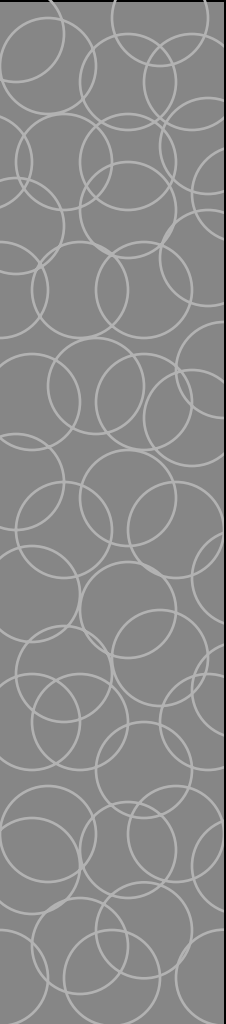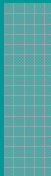
Darsee's Consequences

- 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
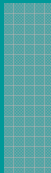- Harvard: 9 papers, 21 abstracts withdrawn

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
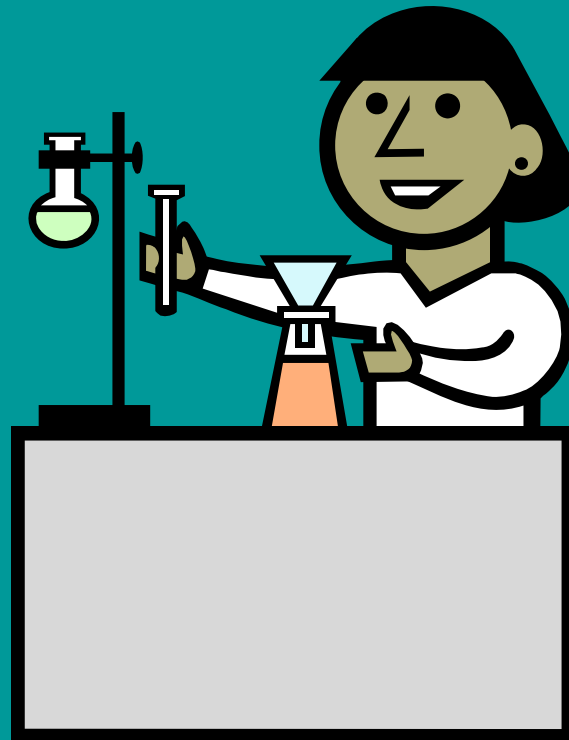
Outcomes…

- ◆ 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
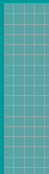
Ethical Issues and values

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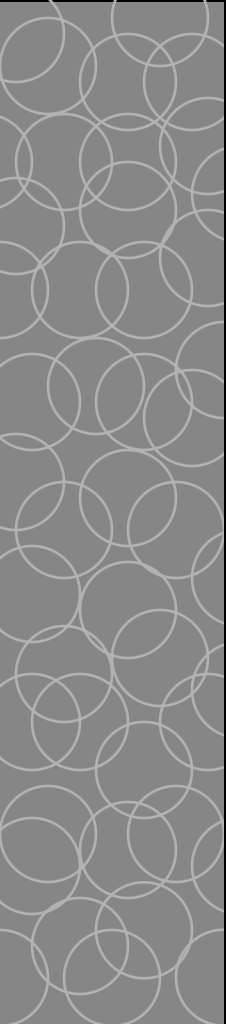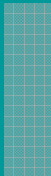
- Hippocratic oath
  - Do no harm
  - Benevolence
- Moral code of ethics
  - Most research is done with an idea in mind of what the outcome should be, an hypothesis
  - A skewed starting view based off of falsified data could corrupt the correct interpretation of data

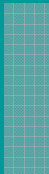# Violated Standards

- ◆ 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” ??
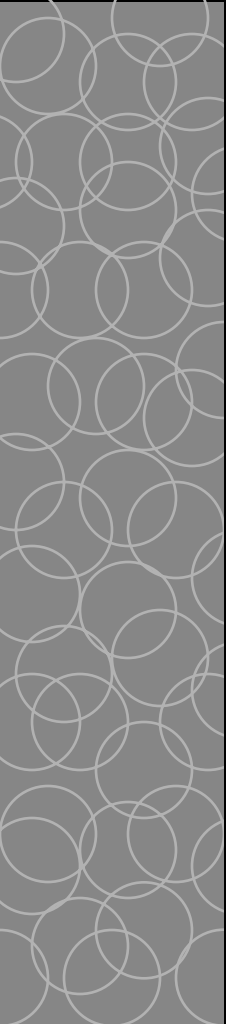
Recommendations: Darsee case

- 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.