Scientific Misconduct Cases Revealed

Nothing, it seems, goes quickly when it comes to resolving cases of scientific misconduct. In response to a Freedom of Information Act request from *Science*, the Public Health Service's Office of Scientific Integrity Review (OSIR) last week released the final reports on all completed investigations where misconduct had been found and sanctions imposed. The haul was not impressive. In the office's first year of operation, only three cases have made it all the way through the federal review process. All were initiated in 1987 and were closed last summer.

If this number is an accurate indicator, then the problem of scientific misconduct is truly quite small. But some in Congress apparently think otherwise. Two congressional committees, one chaired by Representative John Dingell (D–MI) and the other by New York Democrat Ted Weiss, last year expressed dissatisfaction with the speed and thoroughness of Public Health Service investigations, and both have pledged to keep up the pressure for improvements. The paucity of completed cases could give the committees another piece of ammunition.

OSIR director Lyle Bivens says misconduct has been determined in a handful of other cases, but these will not be formally closed until appeals by the accused scientists have run their course. Bivens drew some criticism himself in January when he told an audience at the AAAS annual meeting that OSIR would keep secret the results of all its investigations. He later said he had misstated the policy; those in which misconduct had been determined and sanctions imposed would be made public.

Only one of the three completed investigations resulted in barring a researcher from receiving federal funds for his research. That case involves former Stanford University psychiatrist Philip Berger (see *Science*, 25 August 1989, p. 812), who was found guilty of "deviations from accepted practices in the conduct and reporting of science." Specifically, Berger inaccurately reported that individuals identified in some studies as being drug-free were, in fact, taking medication, and he also used as normal controls patients who were identified in another study as suffering memory loss. Berger is barred from Health and Human Services grants or contracts for 3 years.

The other two cases resulted in less severe penalties. The National Institutes of Health concluded that physiologist Douglas O. Nelson, formerly of Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, misrepresented the publication status of his papers in manuscripts and grant applications submitted to NIH. His punishment included being excluded from sitting on NIH advisory panels and requiring supervision for his federally funded research.

In the final case, an investigation by the National Institute of Mental Health determined that psychologist Lonnie Mitchell of Coppin State College in Baltimore, Maryland, used plagiarized material in an application for a Minority Access to Research Careers Research Training Grant application. Mitchell and his department chairman Jerusa Wilson are prevented from serving on Public Health Service advisory committees for 3 years, and Mitchell must "supply certification as to the integrity, honesty, and reliability" of any PHS applications he makes in the next 5 years.

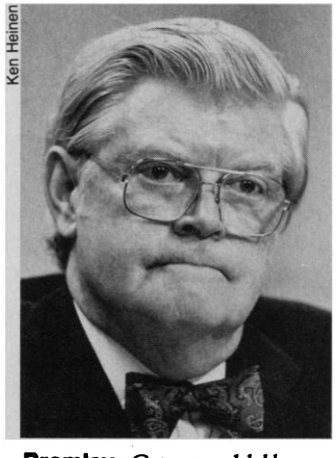
Investigations of PHS grantees are now conducted by the Office of Scientific Integrity (OSI), which is in the office of the director of NIH. Once OSI completes its work, it hands off to Bivens' staff, which reviews the findings and recommends sanctions where appropriate. OSI has not had a permanent director in the year since it was established—until 8 April, when Jules V. Hallum, chairman of microbiology and immunology at the Oregon Health Sciences University in Portland, was given the job. Hallum is chairman of the American Society for Microbiologists' committee on ethical practices.

■ JOSEPH PALCA

Bromley Promises Small Science Focus

Preaching to an audience of the already converted, D. Allan Bromley, President Bush's science adviser, last week said that "funding for small science must be protected if American science is to remain healthy and flourish." But he then went on to admit that the Bush Administration's budget "did not succeed [in supporting small science] to the extent we would have wished." Next year, said Bromley, "we will be giving very special attention to the support of individual investigators and young researchers."

The reason: The proportion of approved grants actually funded by the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation dropped below 30% this year and now stands at an all-time low. "The discouragement caused by a lack of funding is particularly unfortunate at a time when the nation has a very serious need to recruit more young people into scientific careers," Bromley told the 15th annual AAAS R&D colloquium. Yet the Bush Administration's budget for NIH in fiscal year 1991 would provide an increase of only 4.7%, just a little above inflation. In contrast, NASA's budget, driven by the voracious appetite of that epitome of big science, the space station, would go up by 20%.


Ken Heinen

Bromley: *Get out and lobby.*

Overall, however, Bromley said he is proud of the science and technology budget, which would provide real increases for research and development—particularly basic research—at a time when other areas of federal spending are under severe pressure.

Bromley also pointed proudly to a bureaucratic change he has engineered to give more attention to scientific issues that cut across several disciplines and involve many different agencies. He has revitalized a moribund panel called the Federal Coordinating Council for Science, Engineering, and Technology (FCCSET, pronounced "fixit"), by requiring that its members be drawn from the top ranks of government agencies. A FCCSET panel last year drew up a game plan for federal research on climate change, which was in large part responsible for a 57% increase in funding for climate studies. Other panels are now focusing on education and human resources; food, agriculture, and forests; international science and engineering; life sciences and health; physical, mathematical, and engineering sciences; and technology and industry.

Finally, Bromley called on scientists to do a bit of lobbying on Capitol Hill in support of funding for science. That remark prompted one member of the audience to suggest that lobbying the Administration might also be in order since Congress traditionally increases the Administration's budget for two of the priority areas Bromley outlined—support for individual investigators through NIH and science education. Bromley said he would welcome lobbying at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue.

■ COLIN NORMAN