

Media Release

For Immediate Release

Publish or Perish? New Recommendations for Promoting Research Integrity Published

The Irish Council for Bioethics (ICB) is today (**26th October 2010**) launching its report entitled ***Recommendations for Promoting Research Integrity***.

The aim of science is to increase our understanding and knowledge beyond what is already known of the world we live in. Support for science and research stems from the improvements these endeavours have brought to people's lives e.g. health research has contributed enormously to society through the understanding, treatment and alleviation of illnesses and diseases. However, support for scientific research depends very much upon the credibility and integrity of the science system and upon public trust in the individuals and institutions conducting research.

Doubts about the integrity of research can have serious implications for public policy. The "**Climategate**" controversy erupted in November 2009 when around one thousand hacked e-mails from the Climatic Research Unit (CRU) of the University of East Anglia were posted on the Internet. The content of the e-mails called into question the work and reputation of the CRU, the reliability of climate science in general and the conclusions of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

As the single biggest funder of R&D, the **Irish taxpayer** needs not only to be informed about the research s/he funds, but also to know that this research is conducted and reported properly, transparently and honestly. It is the belief of the ICB that achieving this goal requires the implementation of a **comprehensive framework** incorporating measures, not only to deal with misconduct but also to promote integrity.

Ireland currently lacks a formal framework to ensure good research practice. The ICB is publishing ***Recommendations for the Promotion of Research Integrity***, which will hopefully support research institutions in the cultivation of a standardised approach to promoting research integrity and dealing with allegations of misconduct.

Main Conclusions of the Report:

- **Education and training** in good research practice is an essential factor in promoting integrity. The ICB is of the opinion that education and training should begin early in an individual's research career; at undergraduate level and should extend over an individual's entire career irrespective of his/her level of seniority.
- A **clear definition of misconduct** is necessary in order to facilitate better awareness and understanding of research integrity amongst researchers. The ICB is of the view that this definition should not be limited to falsification, fabrication and plagiarism but should also incorporate other serious breaches of good scientific practice that are committed either wilfully or through negligence.

- An individual's personal and professional life can suffer dramatically as a consequence of deciding to report acts of misconduct. In light of this vulnerability and in recognition of the integral role whistleblowers play in counteracting misconduct, society has a responsibility to implement measures to protect these individuals. The ICB recommends that a **dedicated whistleblower's charter** and associated legislation be enacted in Ireland in order to support efforts to deter scientific misconduct.
- The ICB is of the view that Ireland should have a **national coordinating body** tasked with overseeing and managing efforts to promote integrity through support and training and to handle allegations of misconduct. The establishment of a national coordinating body would also increase the credibility of Irish research, which influences funding as well as public perception and the degree of trust in the research enterprise.

According to **Dr Siobhán O'Sullivan** (Managing Director of the ICB) "Scientific research is not conducted in a vacuum, rather it impacts on all aspects of society. While research developments can affect society positively, the relationship between science and society can be badly damaged as a result of misconduct, which, in turn, could lead to diminished public support for research."

Ends:

Notes to Editor:

- The Irish Council for Bioethics is an independent, national body set up by the Government in 2002 to consider the ethical questions raised by biological research and biomedicine, such as stem cell research, IVF, genetic modification and euthanasia. An important objective of the Council is to promote public understanding, informed discussion and education with respect to bioethical issues. For more information see www.bioethics.ie
- Bioethics is a discipline dealing with the ethical implications of research and practice in the biological sciences and medicine. It facilitates a deeper understanding of a range of moral choices, which can inform decision-making in areas of public policy and with respect to the direction and control of science. Bioethics is also a forward looking discipline, working to anticipate future questions of concern, encourage awareness about them and stimulate progressive debate amongst the public.
- **Other Examples of Scientific Misconduct:**
 - **Dr Werner Bezwoda (University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa):** He reported positive results for a clinical trial, which treated breast cancer using a combination of high-dose chemotherapy and bone marrow transplants. Following an independent review in 2000, it was discovered that signed consent forms were not contained in the study participants' records, many of the participants were ineligible for enrollment and the study proposal had not been assessed by a research ethics committee prior to the commencement of the project. As a consequence of these findings further reviews were carried out on Bezwoda's earlier studies. One revealed that there were at least three deaths, which could possibly be attributed to the use of high-dose chemotherapy.

- **Jesse Gelsinger (USA):** On 17th September 1999, Jesse Gelsinger (18 years old) died following his participation in a phase I clinical trial for a new gene therapy treatment at the University of Pennsylvania. Gelsinger experienced a massive immune response to the treatment being administered. Following his death the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) launched an investigation. The FDA found that: toxicities experienced by a number of participants were not accurately reported to the FDA or the university's research ethics committee; trial participants were not informed of the possible risks (including potentially life-threatening adverse events) associated with the trial; nor that the principal researcher and the university owned stock in the company that funded gene therapy research at the university. It also came to light that Gelsinger should have been deemed ineligible to participate in the study due to pre-existing conditions.