

Retraction Watch

Tracking retractions as a window into the scientific process

“We are living in hell:” Authors retract 2nd paper due to missing raw data

[with 15 comments](#)



A 2006 paper investigating the effects of docosahexaenoic acid (DHA) and celecoxib on prostate cancer cells has been retracted because it appears to contain panels that were duplicated, and the authors could not provide the raw data to show otherwise.

This is the second paper the authors have lost [because they couldn't furnish the original data](#) to defend their work against allegations of image manipulation. The reason: the Institute for Cancer Prevention in New York, where the authors did the work, shut its doors abruptly in 2004, co-author [Bhagavathi A. Narayanan](#) told us. (The institute closed thanks to \$5.7 million in grant that was misspent, [the New York Post reported](#) at the time.)

Recently, some of Narayanan's papers have been [questioned on PubPeer](#); her work has been the subject of an investigation at New York University, where Narayanan is now based.

Narayanan told us that the criticism of their work has deeply affected her and her co-authors:

We are living in hell.

Here's the [retraction note](#) for “[Docosahexaenoic acid in combination with celecoxib modulates HSP70 and p53 proteins in prostate cancer cells](#),” published in the *International Journal of Cancer*:

The above article, published online on 27 April 2006 in Wiley Online Library ([wileyonlinelibrary.com](#)), has been retracted by agreement between the authors, the journal Editor-in-Chief, Prof. Peter Lichter, and Wiley Periodicals, Inc. The retraction has been agreed because errors were identified in several figures (Figs 4a, b, c, Fig. 5b, and Fig. 7a) concerning the beta-actin control panels and in Figs. 4b and 5b concerning the HSP70 panels. Panels appear to have been duplicated and the raw data are no longer available to validate the information.

The paper has been cited 25 times, according to Thomson Scientific's Web of Knowledge.

Narayanan said that at the time the work was done, over a decade ago,

There were no rules that you had to keep the data. There was no Retraction Watch.

When we asked Narayanan about her work, she told us “of course science papers have mistakes.” In regards to the comments on PubPeer, she added:

It's discrimination, [it's] jealousy, it is targeting somebody. Most of the PubPeer comments were

meritless. They just want to hurt the people...This is not a pleasant experience to share...This is, at the expense of someones dead body, eating the other person's flesh.

Narayanan told us,

This is not going to end. They will keep on picking things because NYU school of medicine investigated all of our papers.

Indeed, the last retraction for the group noted the paper was pulled based on the findings from an investigation at NYU School of Medicine.

We asked if there were more retraction on the way. She said,

I don't know about that.

This makes retraction number two for first author [Narayanan K. Narayanan](#), Bhagavathi Narayanan, Maarten Bosland and Mark S. Condon. Last author [Dominick Nargi](#) was not an author on the previously retracted paper. Condon is affiliated with the Dutchess Community College in Poughkeepsie, the rest are based at NYU School of Medicine.

We've reached out to NK Narayanan for comment as well. We could not find contact information for Nargi. We will update this post with anything else we learn.

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Written by Shannon Palus

February 23rd, 2016 at 2:00 pm

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Comments



• *fernandopessoa* February 23, 2016 at 2:56 pm

Does anybody know what happened to Roy Victor after 2008 guilty plea? Former chief financial officer of the Institute for Cancer Prevention.

<http://www.justice.gov/archive/usao/nys/pressreleases/January08/victorroyleapr.pdf>

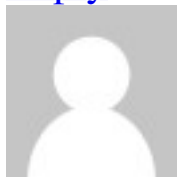
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• *Dave Fernig* February 23, 2016 at 2:59 pm

Generally our offices are full of data – though there is a problem with old stuff, which becomes unreadable after 20-30 years (acid paper, not so much ink on the dot matrix ribbon, etc.). Otherwise piles of lab books, spreadsheets, old computers gathering dust in case we need to read files with ancient software. Granted some offices are clearer than others, but the data are generally still there somewhere, though over zealous University space audits may take their toll on storage space and the longevity of data.

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• *fernandopessoa* February 23, 2016 at 3:07 pm

There seems to be examples of data being re-used in different papers and for different experiments. Providing the original data would not solve that.

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• *Dean* February 23, 2016 at 3:47 pm

I don't care who technically owns the data or the lab notebooks. If I'm first author, I'm taking copies with me, precisely to avoid potential problems. It's called accountability and CYA.

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StrongDreams February 23, 2016 at 5:03 pm

Copies obviously. The originals need to stay with the lab but keeping copies is just good sense. (Although, another problem is the expiration of data formats. I recently found that I could not retrieve personal financial information from a backup dated 1/1/2000, because the 2016 version (which I still have) won't convert that old. The best option may be PDFs rather than word docs or powerpoints, although TIFFS might be safe too.)

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• *Dean* February 23, 2016 at 3:48 pm

A defense of “Well, no one said you had to keep the data, and now I’m being targeted and discriminated against, wah wah wah” always looks suspect.

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• *MannyHMo* February 23, 2016 at 6:16 pm

There is no scientific data or conclusion that’s sacrosanct. It should be able to survive the acid test of doubt and verification.

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• *Betfried van Efget* February 23, 2016 at 6:38 pm

I have to admit, I partly can understand this woman and her manner to react in that way. Folks, you’re SERIOUS, that one can remember where EVERY SINGLE DATA FILE has ever been?

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• *fernandopessoa* February 24, 2016 at 9:43 am

Anticancer Res. 2011 Dec;31(12):4347-57.

Modulation of PGE2-induced EP4 expression on snail signaling and the impact on epithelial-mesenchymal transition: significance of EP4 antagonism.

Kim HN1, Narayanan NK, Lasano S, Narayanan B.

Author information

1New York University School of Medicine, Department of Environmental Medicine, Tuxedo, NY, USA.

Compare figure 2B Anticancer Res 31:4347 (this paper) with figure 4a Int J Cancer 125,1 and with figure 5 Prostate 66:257.

<http://imgur.com/oqvTkUW>

For reference:

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Bobo February 23, 2016 at 4:19 pm

I don't really agree.

10 years is a long time to keep data and remember where you put it. I suspect many labs—if you pushed them—would not be able to dig up all of the data from papers they published 10 years ago. That's not to discount the importance of good archiving, but my guess is that it's unfortunately a very common lapse.

This is one of the reasons why all raw data should be permanently archived online when you submit the article (or before). Notebooks should also be open.

Because people do sometimes forget where they've put their data, I have also often wondered how often the image/lane duplications we see are a matter of laziness as opposed to intentional fraud. I don't know the details of this particular case, but I imagine that it quite often happens that you misplace an image, and it's just "easier" to copy-paste some bands in Photoshop to match what you recorded the gel says rather than re-running the whole experiment. I suspect that this kind of misconduct is more common than outright fraud where everything is made up wholesale.

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fernandopessoa February 24, 2016 at 3:42 am

How reliable does that make the data? Intentional or laziness, does it make any difference to the reliability of the data?

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Bobo February 24, 2016 at 1:16 pm

It makes a huge difference to the reliability of the data. In the case of fraud, one is making things up out of whole cloth with no real evidence to back up what one is saying. In the case of "laziness misconduct", you've already done the experiment and know the true results, but you lost the evidence so you fabricate some evidence to match the results your experiment shows are true. It should be obvious that results of case #1 are far less reliable than results of case #2.

Of course, since the reader cannot tell which of these two explanations is behind any given case of image manipulation, all papers with inappropriately manipulated images need to be investigated by the journal and the author's institution. In case #1, the only acceptable course is retraction (and preferably the firing of the person in question). In case #2, it is possible that the authors could re-run the experiment to obtain real evidence. If their results hold, a correction replacing the manipulated image would suffice. (Personally, I would not ~necessarily~ fire someone for #2 if it were their first/only offense. Severe reprimand, etc.)

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MC February 23, 2016 at 7:17 pm

You've ignored the point here...

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Anticancer Res 31:4347: <https://pubpeer.com/publications/22199300>

Int J Cancer 125,1: <https://pubpeer.com/publications/19326431>

Prostate 66:257: <https://pubpeer.com/publications/16175586>

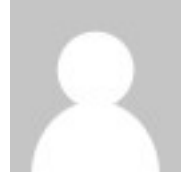
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• *chuckbert* February 24, 2016 at 10:58 am

Possibly missing something here, but isn't the problem that the published data were manipulated, not that the original data can't be found. The "there was no retractionwatch then" argument is very worrying. If there's no policeman around, is it OK to steal?

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• *fernandopessoa* February 25, 2016 at 10:33 am

Int J Oncol. 2012 Jan;40(1):13-20. doi: 10.3892/ijo.2011.1211. Epub 2011 Sep 22.

Epidermal growth factor-stimulated human cervical cancer cell growth is associated with EGFR and cyclin D1 activation, independent of COX-2 expression levels.

Narayanan R1, Kim HN, Narayanan NK, Nargi D, Narayanan B.

Author information

1New York University School of Medicine, Department of Environmental Medicine, Tuxedo, NY 10987, USA.

Figure 4B.

<http://imgur.com/JER4r6I>

Pubpeer comments: <https://pubpeer.com/publications/21946890>

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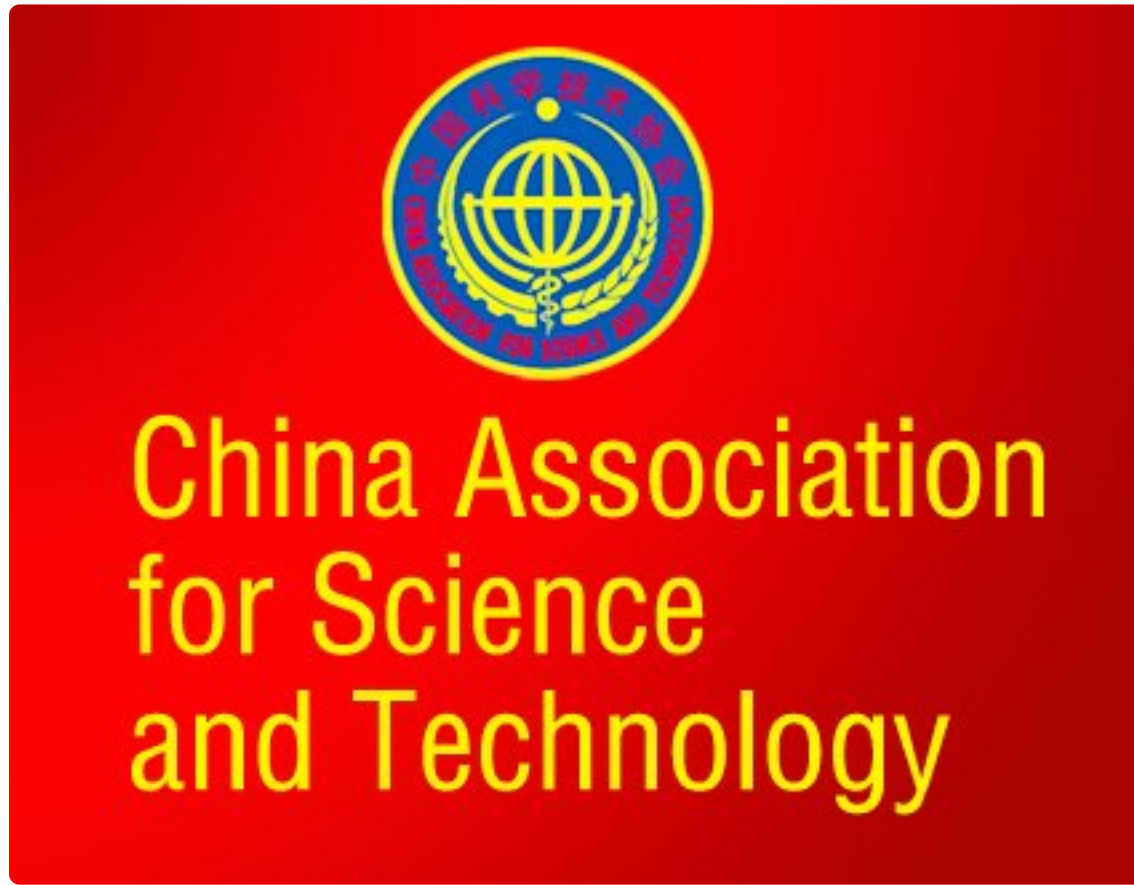
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Researcher pegged for misconduct in 11 papers earns 2nd retraction

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I'm often critical of the peer review process. A peer review @AlisonAbritis and I did for

@F1000Research to critique f1000research.com/articles/5-683/



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