

Research Misconduct

Introduction/Definition

Research misconduct is defined as fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results. It does not include honest error or differences of opinion. It must represent a significant departure from accepted practices of the relevant research community. It must have been committed intentionally, knowingly, or recklessly.

Core Points

1. Research misconduct has a focused and exclusive definition that is codified in Office of Science and Technology Policy, The Code of Federal Regulations, and agency directives for the Department of Defense and Navy Medicine.
2. Research misconduct constitutes a serious breach of the professional ethics standards for research in all disciplines. It violates the public trust, as well as the professional trust within the institution. Where research misconduct has occurred, institutions must take all necessary and substantive steps to ameliorate the situation and attempt to restore professional trust.
3. Per DoDI 3210.7 research misconduct is to be processed at the lowest possible competent level. Research misconduct requires the careful exploration of allegations via inquiry. If inquiry establishes credibility, a formal investigation must be held. If investigation ascertains that research misconduct has occurred, adjudication is required. All processes for research misconduct in Navy Medicine must be processed in accordance with Enclosure 5 of BUMEDINST 6500.3.
4. While research misconduct is to be handled on the local level, research misconduct must be reported to the Surgeon General via the Navy Medicine Executive Research Integrity Officer (ERIO) once matters proceed beyond inquiry to formal investigation. ERIO, however, directs lower echelons and activities in the interpretation of policy and procedural norms found in BUMEDINST 6500.3 and requirements from higher authorities. ERIO works with Offices of Counsel to ensure integration with the requirements of the law.
5. Research misconduct is not the same as academic/scientific misconduct, or regulatory non-compliance. However, it can overlap with these areas. These areas also constitute serious violations against research ethics and professional integrity. Where overlaps may occur, institutions must carefully delineate constitutive elements and adopt strategies that effectively meet all areas.
6. Substantive education, training, and awareness activities must be in place to prevent research misconduct. Zero tolerance policies are required. Transparency is essential as is a community expectation that instances of research misconduct must be reported.

However it is equally important to avoid an inquisitional atmosphere or a climate where allegations of research misconduct can be made in retribution for less than honorable reasons. In all cases, the rights and privacy of all parties must be protected.

7. Particular care and due diligence must be taken if an instance of research misconduct were to involve other DoD or other federal agencies. In these instances, the regulatory requirements of all agencies must be met.

8. In cases where research misconduct is referred from higher DoD authorities to Navy Medicine, the ERIO will chair and coordinate strategic planning so that lower echelon leaders can perform all inquiry, investigation and adjudication requirements completely and without unnecessary delays, burdens, or complications.

Points for Reflection

1. What would be the most substantive strategies for educating your community members about the potential problem of research misconduct and the means to prevent it?
2. If research misconduct were to be discovered and certified in your institution, what means should be taken to restore the professional trust?
3. Identify what might be the real factors leading to a misuse of whistle blowing. How can this be avoided?

References

42 CFR 50 and 93

DoDI 3210.7 and BUMEDINST 6500.3

Research Misconduct in Resources for Research Ethics Education. As found at:
<http://www.research-ethics.net/topics/research-misconduct/#background>