

## ALLEGATIONS OF RESEARCH MISCONDUCT

***VA employees have a responsibility to report suspicions of research misconduct if, after a careful assessment of the facts that are readily available to them in the course of their normal duties, they honestly and reasonably believe there is evidence of research misconduct as defined below.***

- **Research Misconduct.** Research misconduct is defined as fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism in proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results. *NOTE: Requests for funding (e.g., VA Merit Award applications) are considered research proposals and submitting such a request is considered to be one example of proposing research.*
  - **Fabrication.** Fabrication is making up data or results and recording or reporting them.
  - **Falsification.** Falsification is manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes, or changing or omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research record.
  - **Plagiarism.** Plagiarism is the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit. For purposes of this policy, plagiarism does not include authorship, credit, or intellectual property disputes among collaborators on the research study in question.
  - Research misconduct does not include honest error or differences of opinion.
- Research misconduct is limited to the definition above. If an employee is concerned with other types of potential misconduct, s/he should proceed through other mechanisms.
- VHA Office of Research Oversight has issued a handbook, "Research Misconduct" ([VHA HB 1058.02](#)), that provides great detail on the processes of investigating, reporting and concluding an allegation of research misconduct.
- Locally, VAMHCS Policy Memorandum, "Reporting an Allegation of Research Misconduct" (512-151-106), provides detail on the process to initiate an allegation of

research misconduct. This policy is available on the VAMHCS intranet site and is attached to this Hot Topic.

- The following actions apply to informants<sup>1</sup> in an allegation of research misconduct:
  - Individuals who wish to make an allegation of research misconduct (“informants”) or who have concerns or questions regarding potential research misconduct should contact the VAMHCS Research Integrity Officer (RIO) for guidance or to initiate proceedings.
  - An informant may, but is not required to, make preliminary inquiries of the individual suspected of research misconduct or of that individual’s supervisor. However, informants must not undertake their own protracted investigation of the suspected misconduct outside of the procedures set forth in VHA Handbook 1058.02 prior to filing an allegation or at any time thereafter.
  - VA employees, former VA employees, and applicants for VA employment who make allegations of research misconduct consistent with the Whistleblower Protection Act of 1989, may seek redress for retaliation as provided under that Act. See Title 5 U.S.C. §1201 Notes, et seq.
  - An informant who submits a good faith and reasonable allegation of research misconduct in accordance with VHA Handbook 1058.02 §14c must be given an opportunity to provide testimony during the inquiry and investigation phases, to review portions of the Investigation Report that relate to the informant’s allegation, and to be informed of the general outcome of the inquiry and investigation as it relates to the informant’s allegation.
  - VA employees whose research misconduct allegations are not made in good faith may be subject to disciplinary measures pursuant to existing VA policies.
- The current VAMHCS RIO is Dr. Christopher T. Bever, Jr, ACOS/R&D who can be reached at: [christopher.bever@va.gov](mailto:christopher.bever@va.gov) or 410-605-7130. When an allegation of research noncompliance is made, the RIO proceeds according to VHA Handbook 1058.02.

<sup>1</sup> **Informant.** An informant is the individual who submits an initial written, formal allegation of research misconduct... *NOTE: Individuals who only submit an allegation orally or anonymously are considered to be non-informant sources, and all roles and responsibilities otherwise adhering to informants under VHA Handbook 1058.02 will be deemed not applicable to the oral or anonymous conveyor of the allegation unless and until the individual subsequently submits an identified, written allegation.* [1058.02 §5.i]

For questions concerning this or other Research Service Hot Topics OR for adding staff or colleagues to the Hot Topics mailing list, contact:

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