

SPOTTED

Grant gaffe; brain bestowal; biobank blitz

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Grant gaffe

Columbia University has to pay the U.S. government \$9.5 million after issuing false financial claims on more than 400 National Institute of Health (NIH) grants. *Retraction Watch* ran a **breakdown of the settlement** this week.

If you get an NIH grant, you can get reimbursed for 'indirect costs' for necessities such as facilities and maintenance. If you use an on-campus building for research, you can collect about double what you would get if you used an off-campus building.

Columbia collected the on-campus rate for 423 grants between 2003 and 2015, despite conducting the research at two publicly owned buildings, according to *Retraction Watch*. A whistleblower tipped off the NIH, which then sued the university under the False Claims Act.

Could the mistake have been innocent? To win the case, the government needed to show that Columbia knowingly made false statements in the grants.

SOURCES:

Retraction Watch / 14 Sep 2016

Columbia has settled a fraud case for \$9.5M. Here's why that's important

<http://retractionwatch.com/2016/09/14/columbia-has-settled-a-fraud-case-for-9-5m-heres-why-thats-important/>

Prestigious prize

On Tuesday, seven researchers took home one of the highest honors in science: a **Lasker award**.

The prize, bestowed annually, recognizes significant contributions in basic and clinical research. This year's winners in the basic science category discovered how animals adapt to low levels of oxygen. The three recipients of the clinical award designed a system for studying hepatitis C that led to effective treatments.

A special achievement award went to biochemist **Bruce Alberts** of the University of California, San Francisco, for his efforts to improve science education.

SOURCES:

Lasker Foundation / 01 Jan 1970

2016 Award winners

<http://www.laskerfoundation.org/awards/>

Brain bestowal

There's a limit to what autism researchers can learn from cells and mice. Many clues about the condition are buried inside the brains of those affected, and this precious brain tissue is hard to come by.

A story by CNN yesterday features a mother who made the difficult decision to **donate her deceased son's brain** to autism research.

Leslie Bolen's teenage son, Michael, died unexpectedly in April from complications of **epilepsy**. He also had autism and was minimally verbal, which made it difficult to know what he needed, Bolen told CNN.

"If there was one thing that we could do to keep another family from experiencing not knowing their child or keeping their child from putting their head through a wall, then we felt like it was something that we needed to do," she said.

Bolen connected with **Autism BrainNet**, a national program that collects donated brains and ensures they're **put to the best possible research use**. (BrainNet is funded in part by the Simons Foundation, *Spectrum's* parent organization.)

"While my heart is forever broken, perhaps his contribution can lead to some answers," she said.

Spectrum interviewed BrainNet director **David Amaral**, distinguished professor of psychiatry at the University of California, Davis MIND Institute, about the program last year.

“Family members tell us that making a brain donation that will support research leading to better lives for children now and in the future helps with their grieving process,” he said at the time.

SOURCES:

CNN / 15 Sep 2016

Why parents donated their son’s brain for autism research

<http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/15/health/autism-brain-donation/>

Biobank blitz

An article in *The Mercury News* this week highlights the **challenge of recruiting families** for autism research.

The story focuses on the **Autism Family Biobank**, a mammoth effort by scientists at Kaiser Permanente’s Autism Research Program to collect DNA and detailed medical information from 5,000 children with the condition and their parents. (The project receives funding from the Simons Foundation, *Spectrum*’s parent organization.) But with just 1,200 families enrolled and funds set to run out in 2018, researchers are worried they won’t have the numbers they need.

“A more robust number allows you to subdivide the population being studied into groups that might have different risk factors for a type of autism, or manifestations of autism,” study leader **Lisa Croen**, director of the Autism Research Program at Kaiser Permanente, told *The Mercury News*.

Some families worry about the time commitment. Participation in research often requires clinic visits and filling out lengthy questionnaires. *Spectrum* spoke to Croen last year about the difficulties in convincing busy parents to **participate in research**.

“As much as possible, we need to take advantage of the existing data from families,” she said at the time. “We can use information such as people’s medical records or blood specimens that they’re already giving for clinical purposes.”

SOURCES:

The Mercury News / 13 Sep 2016

Can Kaiser’s autism program find 3,800 families before deadline?

<http://www.mercurynews.com/2016/09/13/biobank-aims-to-help-research-on-autism/>

Job news

Making a career move? Send your news to jobmoves@spectrumnews.org.
