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KOREAN STEM CELL SCANDAL

Schatten: Pitt Panel Finds 'Misbehavior' but Not Misconduct

A University of Pittsburgh (UP) panel has declared stem cell researcher Gerald Schatten innocent of research misconduct in the South Korean stem cell debacle. But his failure to more closely oversee research with his name on it does make him guilty of "research misbehavior," according to a summary report released on 3 February.

In December, after the discovery of misdeeds by South Korean cloning researcher Woo Suk Hwang, UP medical school dean Arthur Levine set up a panel of six senior researchers to investigate the role of Schatten, who was presented as senior author on a paper purporting to show that disease-specific cell lines had been derived using stem cells from cloned human embryos. The paper, published in *Science* in June (17 June 2005, p. 1777), has been withdrawn.

The university panel said there is no evidence that Schatten falsified anything or that he was aware of any misconduct. However, it comes down hard on him for "shirk[ing]" his responsibilities when it came to assuring the veracity of the manuscript.

The report relates that Schatten and Hwang first met at a stem cell meeting in Seoul in December 2003 and developed a close relationship, which soon bore fruit for both scientists: It says Schatten's behind-the-scenes "lobbying" of *Science* editors helped assure the publication of a 2004 paper (12 March 2004, p. 1669) on the development of stem cells from a cloned human embryo, a charge *Science* Editor-in-Chief Donald Kennedy denies, saying, "If anything, hearing from Jerry was a distraction."

Schatten had nothing to do with the authorship of the 2004 paper, which was also subsequently found to be fraudulent. But he devoted "a tremendous amount of time and energy" to the 2005 paper, composing numerous drafts and allowing his name to appear as senior author. Despite this, "he did not exer-

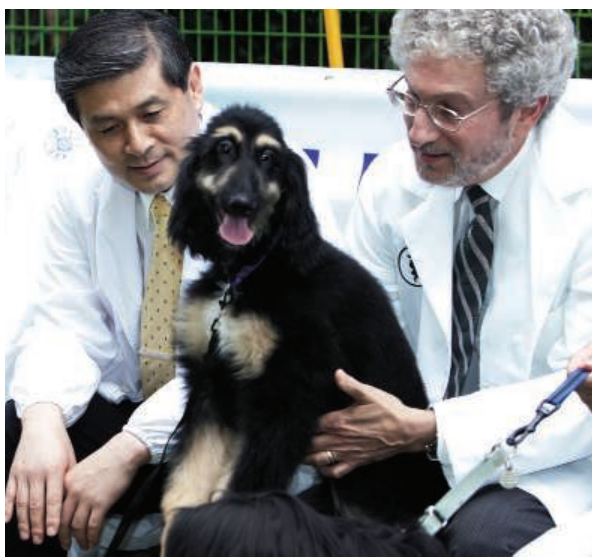


Photo opportunity. Gerald Schatten's (right) major contribution to the "Snuppy paper" was to suggest a professional photographer.

cise a sufficiently critical perspective as a scientist," the panel relates.

For example, Hwang told Schatten in January 2005 that some cell lines had been lost through contamination. But Schatten failed to realize from this that there was not enough time to grow and analyze new ones by 15 March when the paper was first submitted. He also failed to ensure that all 25 co-authors had approved the manuscript before submission.

The investigators suggest that Schatten's desire for "reputational enhancement" may have helped land him in his current predicament. For example, in December, he told them that he had written the 2005 paper. But 3 weeks later, he told investigators from Seoul National University (SNU) that he had not. "[T]his appears to be part of a concerted and deliberate effort ... to further distance himself from Dr. Hwang and their joint publications," the panel concluded. This it labeled "disingenuous" and "in sharp contrast to the full participation of Dr. Schatten in the media spotlight following publication of the paper."

The panel also takes a swipe at Schatten's role as a co-author on the so-called Snuppy paper, published in *Nature* in August 2005, reporting on the first cloning of a dog. (That

achievement was confirmed to be authentic.) "We have no reason to doubt [his] statement to us that his major contribution ... was a suggestion that a professional photographer be engaged so that Snuppy would appear with greater visual appeal," says the report. "It is less clear that this contribution fully justifies co-authorship."

Schatten profited financially as well, according to the report, which says, "He was not averse to accepting honoraria totaling \$40,000 within a 15-month period from Dr. Hwang—including \$10,000 paid in cash" at a press conference on the 2005 paper. These amounts seem "far above normal honoraria for consultation," the panel writes. But it does have a few kind words for Schatten, acknowledging his "expeditious and appropriate actions" upon learning of problems with the paper.

The report recommends no specific disciplinary action, calling on the university to take action "commensurate with ... research misbehavior," a term apparently unique to UP. Chris Pascal, director of the Office of Research Integrity of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, says universities have a right to add refinements to categories of malfeasance. But Kennedy says, "I think 'research misbehavior' is not a term that anybody in our community understands."

No further details are available from UP, which said no officials would be available for interviews. Schatten continues to maintain the silence he has held ever since he broke off his collaboration with Hwang last November.

Many of Schatten's colleagues in the stem cell world are being restrained in their reactions. "I have nothing to say about this sad situation," says Harvard University researcher George Daley. But Evan Snyder, a stem cell researcher at the Burnham Institute in San Diego, California, believes Schatten was as much a victim as anyone else. "Jerry is kicking himself for having trusted this guy as much as he did," says Snyder. "He knows the buck stopped with him. ... I don't think he needs to be slapped on the wrist for being an opportunist." Snyder also says Schatten broke with Hwang immediately after Hwang told him about unethical egg donations.

Back in South Korea, SNU last week suspended Hwang and the six SNU professors listed as co-authors on the 2004 and 2005 papers. They will be barred from teaching and research until an SNU disciplinary committee announces its findings. —CONSTANCE HOLDEN
With reporting by Sei Chong.