Ethics seminar I: Research Collaboration

By group 3:
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Responsibility

- Principle investigator (PI) = coordinating research director
  - National coordinator
  - Local research director
    - Researcher
    - PhD
Dilemma

A large multinational research project, partly funded by a medical technology company, is testing a technology this company is marketing and is criticized for this in medical trade journals. It turns out that researchers in different countries have used different methods to round off numbers – in all cases to the benefit of the funding company.

You suspect that someone has made a mistake, possibly unintentional, but perhaps to benefit certain interested parties. Should you report this? To whom? The project employs a considerable number of researchers at your department and has received a great deal of international attention.
Will there be any ethical problems or conflicts?

- Unethical to not report mistake (intentional or not) → misuse of medical devices? (cause harm?)
- Publish ‘wrong‘ data (not reproducible) → affects researcher‘s careers independent if intentional ‘mistake‘ or not
- Research group is funded by company → affects your fundings present and future
Will the decision / solution cause any ethical problems or conflicts?

- May damage careers
- If the results can be reproduced / are correct your career will suffer
- To whom should you report first (as researcher/PhD)?
  - Researcher themselves (who made ‘mistake‘) can cause additional ethical problems
  - Local research director
- In general: next higher instance
Are there alternative solutions?

Two main possibilities:
• Report it
• Or not (keeping quiet is a decision as well!)

However:
E.g. the PI can delay the study:
  – double checking the results
  – decide on a proper / same evaluation method
Who will be affected?

- Careers of all involved individuals are at stake depending on who made a mistake
- Funding problems may arise

Society:
- Mistake yields to misinformation of public → overall well being
- Affects buying behavior of product
What values, duties,... are involved in the solution?

Values:
- Act morally (reproducible results) – duty for public?
- With interests of society in mind

Values ↔ Duties, attitudes

Interests:
- Company
- Society (main interest according to our solution)
What are the weaknesses / strengths of the solution?

Strengths:
- Prevent medical harms, risking of lives
- Ethical standards
- Ensure public trust
- Aim for reproducible results

Weakness:
- May create problems in work environment
- May damage careers (including your own)
- May also damage the companies image → less raised funds
How do you ensure the optimal solution with regards to ethics?

Product already on market:
• Try to update / optimize product
• Worst case: take it from the market – provide alternatives inform stakeholders (for PI)
• Compensation?

If not on the market yet:
• Optimize as well (double and triple check)
What can we do to prevent the situation in the first case?

To avoid large errors:

• Transparency in whole evaluation, analyzing,... process easier to correct small mistakes