Minutes from Panel’s meeting with Jørgen Kurtzhals 12 April 11:00
Approved

Place of meeting: University of Copenhagen, The Panum Institute, room 23.1.10, Copenhagen

Participants:
Jørgen Kurtzhals (JK), Chief Physician, Clinical Microbiology, Rigshospitalet, and Associate Professor, CMP, Department of International Health, Immunology and Microbiology, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Copenhagen.

Panel:
Professor Hans Lassmann (HL), Austria (Chair of Panel)
Professor Margaret M. Esiri (ME), United Kingdom
Professor Christine Dijkstra (CD), The Netherlands
Professor Hartmut Wekerle (HW), Germany
Professor Anders Blomqvist (AB), Sweden

Secretariat to the Panel:
Professor Lars Terenius (LT), Medical Expert in the Secretariat
Consultant Pia Jørnø (PJ), Leader of the Secretariat (Rapporteur)

Agenda:
- Information on procedures, protocols and methodology used in JK’s research collaboration with MP.
- Possible other questions.

Abbreviations:
MP = Milena Penkowa
exp = experiment
IHC = immunohistochemistry
SUND = The Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Copenhagen

Minutes:

HL welcomed JK and asked whether JK would accept a dictaphone turned on. He explained that the dictaphone exclusively was used as support for PJ’s writing of the minutes from the meeting. JK accepted the dictaphone turned on.

HL informed that the Panel’s mission with the interview was fact finding, and he underlined that the Panel is not a trial or a jury. HL informed that JK had not been one of the Panel’s primary candidates for a meeting for obtaining further information, as the scientific papers co-authored by JK (and MP) had not raised suspicion in the Panel of scientific dishonesty of MP.

The Panel has thus invited JK for the meeting on basis of a request from MP.
Information on procedures, protocols and methodology used in JK’s research collaboration with MP

JK introduced himself and explained briefly the course of his career. JK’s collaboration with MP started in 2003-2004, and he and MP have, among other things, collaborated in connection with the respective PhD projects of co-authors Lothar Wiese and Casper Hempel and the Master’s project of Brian DellaValle.

JK told that he has had a lot of good experiences in his collaboration with MP. He finds MP easy to collaborate with and she has initiated several activities. Among other things JK and his students have worked with an experimental animal model on Malaria. In addition, some of the tissue that Brian DellaValle worked with came from Spain. Thus MP did not conduct the animal exps in these cases.

The IHC work - cutting, staining and interpretation of the results – with the tissue was conducted by the students under supervision of MP and MP’s technicians. JK assesses the methodology and interpretation of results used in this IHC work to be valid, as it has been confirmed as valid by Flemming Fryd who was co-supervisor in Brian DellaValle’s PhD project, and Casper Hempel’s working methods and results have been confirmed by pathologists in Sidney, Australia, during Casper Hempel’s stay there.

HL noted that the papers co-authored by JK do not include major critical markers like e.g. cytokine stainings. JK confirmed this and added that there were not any difficult interpretations in these experiments.

JK told that he and his group have moved more into stereology, in order to work with more objective methods than only the very subjective histopathology.

However, JK also told that he has found MP’s supervision of the students very useful, and that he has found no reason to doubt this supervision and no reason to suspect that MP has tried to influence the interpretation of the results.

Furthermore, JK told that considerable documentation for the experiments behind the co-authored papers is stored in his lab, namely slides and protocols that clearly document the connections between the slides and the experiments.

HL told that the Panel has had difficulties with orienting itself to the documentation in the archive holding the items from MP’s lab and office, and asked whether JK had any knowledge of MP’s documentation procedures. JK answered that he did not know how MP documented her work, but that JK always instructed his students in the importance of documenting properly.

Animal exps

On question from HL, JK explained that the animal experiment permissions and the so-called “animal journals” have been obligatory for many years. The researcher must record all
experimental animals and the conducted experiments on each of them in an annual “animal journal” which must be submitted to and approved by the Animal Experiments Authority (Dyreforsøgstilsynet). In the latest years the animal journals have become electronic. In addition there are notebooks in the animal experiment facilities where the “experimentators” must record the animals received, what they are used for etc.

JK has not conducted animal experiments for many years, not since around 1985. It has thus been his students who have held the animal experiment permissions, conducted the experiments and recorded the animal journals. On question from HL, JK confirmed that normally experiments are performed on either the same number of animals or more animals than referred to in the scientific paper. HL also asked whether archival material was sometimes used for experiments. JK confirmed this and added and that it should be stated in the paper if archival material had been used for the research.

HL asked whether there are official guidelines at SUND for good scientific practice. JK told that to his knowledge there were not specific guidelines at SUND, but the researchers are expected to know and follow the international standards for good scientific practice. On question from ME, JK told that it has been part of his scientific education to learn good practice for both animal experiments and other experiments, and he passes this knowledge on to his students. JK added that the “hands-on” training is very important within his field of science, and perhaps more important than written rules/guidelines.

Further possible questions

On question from LT, JK informed that a paper that he was about to publish with MP has been abandoned, because one of the other co-authors has rejected to co-authoring with MP. A paper reporting results of subsequent studies along the same line has just been accepted for publication, but without MP as a co-author, and omitting any data obtained while MP was active at University of Copenhagen.

On question from HW, JK also told that he relied strongly on MP’s expertise on pathology. He explained that he ensured that the necessary control exps were included, because he is quite experienced in flow-cytometry, e.g. different antibody controls. He added that he has never doubted that MP also suggested and included the necessary control exps. JK explained that in e.g. an exp where only a secondary antibody was used, without the primary antibody, a matrix was prepared for studying the different combinations of antibodies, and further activity/control was done if part of the matrix was missing. JK referred to Flemming Fryd who can confirm the validity of Brian DellaValle’s work.

On question from AB, JK explained that he himself has looked at the slides and controls from MP’s and his students’ work from time to another, and that the slides and control slides can be found in his archive. But he emphasised that he is not a pathologist and the evaluation of the slides has thus not been his “department of expertise”.

HL thanked JK for coming and for the provided information which was very helpful for the Panel’s investigation.