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Jeremy Rosenberg
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Dear Mr. Rosenberg,

I responded to the concerns stated in your correspondence dated Dec. 3, 2015 regarding two papers published by Pulukuri, et al. (Cancer Research 67: 930-939, 2007; Cancer Research 67: 6637-6646, 2007) on Jan. 9, 2016. I am now in receipt of your email stating that you still have concerns with the lung images in Fig. 6B (Cancer Research 67: 930-939, 2007) and Fig. 5A (Cancer Research 67: 6637-6646, 2007).

As I stated in my original response in January, I have been involved in a wrongful termination lawsuit against the University of Illinois since 2013. I have not had access to my lab or data and files since that time. Of note, we provided the notebooks and discs relevant to these two Pulukuri manuscripts to Dr. Grabiner in October 2012. However, during Dr. Grabiner's recent deposition this past August, he admitted that they did not look at all of the experimental data; he stated that they examined the notebooks but not the discs. If they had done so, then they would have seen that the images came from different animals.

In addition, the first author of the papers (Dr. Murali Pulukuri) left the University in 2009. He provided the information that I submitted to you in January. However, I have not been able to reach him since receiving your latest email. Nonetheless, I will do my best to address your recent concerns.

You have asked "Why some of the lung images appear roughly similar by visual inspection."

We want to make it very clear that some of these images may appear roughly comparable but they are actually different images. One may notice irregularly shaped lung images in these figures (sometimes two pieces). As indicated, all these studies were done using an orthotopic prostate model. The lung organs were collected and imaged using IVIS at the end of the experiment (approximately 50-90 organs at each time). Since they were tiny and dehydrated after surgery, they appear as irregularly shaped organs across the board. Some of them show little variation in shape and appearance by IVIS imaging out of many organs examined. In our experience and others as well, the IVIS assay based on luciferase photon count is very reliable whereas image analysis based on the morphology of the organ is qualitative.

Further, these images were taken at the high contrast/brightness to represent the maximum clarity of the bioluminescence signal in the image. This technique provides a better look for the figure;

however, this option makes the morphology of mice less clear and provides a notion that some portions of the morphology are similar although the actual photon counts are different.

Ultimately, the data is sound and there would have been no point to duplicate any of these images. Of note, the University's investigation panel found that "the manipulation of this single image should not by itself invalidate the conclusions of the paper."

You next suggest that "figure reuse was also noticed in Fig. 5A of the manuscript of Gangi, et al. (Molecular Cancer Research 9: 51-66, 2011). This is not possible. The Gangi, et al. paper involved the study of medulloblastoma whereas the Pulukuri, et al. papers involved lung and prostate cancers. In Gangi, et al.'s Fig. 5A demonstrates that the effect of pU, pM or pUM plasmids alone or in combination with radiation on DNA fragmentation (apoptosis) in DAOY medulloblastoma cells. DAOY cells were transfected with pSV, pU, pM and pUM plasmids. After 36 hours of incubation, cells were irradiated with 8 Gy and incubated further for 12 hours. TUNEL (apoptosis) assay was carried out to assess the induction of apoptosis after respective treatment. The green fluorescence staining indicates positive apoptotic cells and DAPI staining was used to localize nucleus. The apoptotic cells were counted in five random fields. These experiments were not performed in prostate cancer cell lines as was the case in Pulukuri, et al. (Cancer Research 67: 930-939, 2007; 67:6637-6646, 2007). Simply stated, how could Gangi's Fig. 5A data (Molecular Cancer Research 9: 51-66, 2011) be duplicated or manipulated from Pulukuri's Cancer Research manuscripts when they involve different cancers and one has irradiated samples?

If you have any additional questions, please kindly let me know.

Sincerely,
Dr. Jasti S. Rao