

## **Authors Statement in response to *Journal of Biological Chemistry* Retraction (JBC).**

**December 29, 2018**

We respectfully disagree with the *Journal of Biological Chemistry* (JBC) regarding an article published in the year 2003.

The Authors stand by the veracity of the work and its conclusions which are unaffected.

The reason for this is that it was universally accepted practice in 2003 to reuse baseline/control values when they did not represent different experimental conditions.

This is the crux of the issue.

Had the JBC afforded the Authors the opportunity they would have explained this in an addendum to the article.

That an explanatory addendum was not permitted by the JBC is disappointing given it has been made available to others in similar technical circumstances.

Given the only choice offered was either voluntary withdrawal or retraction the Authors have chosen to force a retraction as a show of confidence in the work.

Further, there are other relevant and important facts:

- Crucially, the Authors are fully compliant with the JBC's guidelines for the retention of data;
- The Authors informed the JBC that the duplications in Fig 4 and Fig 10 were deliberate since they were used to demonstrate the same baseline values (accepted practice in 2003) and not different experimental conditions as claimed by the journal. The Authors offered to amend the figure legends to show this but this was not accepted.
- The Authors repeatedly asked for an explanation of the evidence for the alleged duplication of the other blots but the journal did not supply this. In Fig 6A all of the blots have similar morphology as expected on the home-made gels but they are visually different. This is also true for the Fig 10 allegation of lane 3 of the normoxic panel and lane 2 of the hypoxic panel, i.e. they are not duplicates.
- The main problem was that only degraded images generated on 1990s technology were available and the Authors could not supply the JBC with original films of the experiments performed over 16 years ago, even though they had retained them for a period beyond the journal's current requirements.
- A formal 19-month investigation by a panel of independent experts has already ruled on this matter in favour of the Authors in 2018;
- That independent panel unanimously agreed that it was accepted practice in 2003 to reuse baseline/control values when they did not represent different experimental conditions;
- The proper and formal process found no motivation, rationale, intent or any actual wrongdoing of any kind and rejected the complaint as baseless;

- This investigation was initiated following a complaint made by a professional complainant and activist who failed to appear at this investigation for cross examination; and
- The Authors understand the independent panel is now itself subject of a complaint by the same unnamed complainant;

The Authors express concern that the high profile of Dr Demasi has served as a target for this particular complainant.

This complainant continues to shop allegations from one jurisdiction and one media outlet to the next, undissuaded by exhaustive and independently verified rejection.

The Authors understand that the complaint to the JBC was made by this same complainant.

This decision also poses three important questions for the scientific community:

- Who is regulating the conduct, standards and conflicts of interest of the self-appointed complainants?
- What protections are available to scientists/publications/assessors/independent panels who are subject to serial campaigns or threats of such in the media and who must bear the cost of the defence?
- And how many other articles will now need to be retracted because of retrospective application of modern technical rules on universally accepted practices of the past?

These comments and questions are respectfully offered by the Authors as an expression of both disappointment that this issue has not been treated with more common sense and concern for the next scientists subject to unfair treatment.

Prof Michael J James  
Prof Leslie G Cleland  
Dr Maryanne Demasi  
Dr Gillian Caughey

*\*Please note that the Authors have asked for this full statement to be published in any reporting of this issue*

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