Eldrin F. Lewis, MD, MPH, FACC, FAHA
Chair, Scientific Publishing Committee
American Heart Association May 28, 2022

Re: Doser TA, Tuerdi S, Thomas DP, Epstein PN, Li SY, Ren J. Transgenic overexpression of aldehyde dehydrogenase-2 rescues chronic alcohol intake-induced myocardial hypertrophy and contractile dysfunction. Circulation. 2009;119:1941-1949. DOI:
10.1161/CIRCULATIONAHA.108.823799

Zhang Y, Yuan M, Bradley KM, Dong F, Anversa P, Ren J. Insulin-like growth factor 1 alleviates high- fat diet-induced myocardial contractile dysfunction: Role of insulin signaling and mitochondrial function. Hypertension. 2012;59:680-693. DOI:
10.1161/HYPERTENSIONAHA.111.181867.

Dear Dr. Lewis

I received your letter dated May 25, 2022 regarding retraction of the two AHA publications. First of all, I wish to sincerely express my apology for these mistakes. As a long time AHA study section member, FAHA and editorial board member of our society journals, I regret these mistakes from my lab although I truly believe that these are correctable issues (some of them may reflect “difference of opinion”. All these mistakes or “difference in opinion” deal with loading controls and none had any impact on the bar graphs or study conclusion. Here are some key points I wish to bring to your attention.

1. The University of Wyoming research integrity officer Dr. Brandt sent retraction request without contact any author or request any original data of this study. For a standard investigation, at least these should be listed as allegations and evidence be collected. Dr. Brandt sent retract requests to journals for work belonging to my collaborating Chinese universities (rather than University of Wyoming) only because the gel band width is not even (see below). Thus, this current University of Wyoming investigation (for which retraction is based on) is not legitimate since it is only based on publication figures with some vague terms (image manipulation).

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1. The 2012 Hypertension paper (Zhang et al) went through investigation twice during 2013 -2015 by University of Wyoming research office (headed by former Vice President for Res Bill Gern and RIO Dorothy Yates, both retired now, committee chair was Joseph G. Rosse) and a full investigation team comprised of Western experts. I don’t believe the current RIO Dr. Brandt was with UW research office then. The issues were related to image duplication and gel splicing. I overcommitted myself in administration work (PI for a 10-year 30 million research grant and served as college associate dean) and failed to stay on top of my own research lab closely. I took the full responsibility for our mistakes. The committee sequestered my computer files without prior notice and checked original data. During the 18-month investigation, I went through data files, excel generation for each figure to the committee several times. Most researchers in the lab including Dr. Zhang were interviewed. The conclusion was “reckless mistakes” and “with no intention to obtain specific results”. Some of the new findings by Dr. Brandt (such as same loading controls) were discussed 8 years ago by the committee (which was a part of my previous correction) and may reflect “difference in opinion”. The committee concluded that there were some cumbersome (but not data fabricating) lab practices in running loading controls (notice that all these issues specified in your letter deals with loading control). I am attaching both decision letters and reports to you including one sent to Hypertension in 2014. If these are not obvious new misconducts, we should honor the 2014-2015 decision (twice) suggesting data support conclusion and allow correction be made.
2. Dr. Brandt is correct that the 2009 Circulation paper does contain two mistakes. In both cases, a loading control (either from one tissue or one protein) was accidentally copied and pasted twice - causing duplication. The correct loading control was in the PPT file although they were mistaken left out. As an AHA standard, these loading control errors are correctable and were not done trying to alter study conclusion. I am attaching a few examples of AHA journal corrections for this type of mistakes including one of myself 2014 Hypertension for exactly the same reason (duplicating loading controls).
3. Our standard in 2022 is quite different from 12-15 years ago (when both papers were submitted). Many immunoblots were not done using the best practice. Gel splicing was a common violation 15 years ago. Even today I still see many AHA papers use same loading control to represent different proteins. Dr, Brandt has sent retract request to journals only because I had same loading control for different proteins in one figure (representing same experimental groups). This reflects the threshold of retraction from University of Wyoming RIO (although journal kindly allowed a correction). I stopped using this bad practice since the completion of 2014-2015 investigation.
4. For my poor lab management and supervision prior to the 2014-2015 investigation, I received severe sanction by the University including removal from directorship of multi-million research program, removal of administrative, editorial, grant review and advisor positions. Both me and Dr. Zhang did the best practice in science from then and were free from any scientific violations or misconduct since the conclusion of the 2014-2015 investigation. I am including a screen shot of the committee report for conclusion (since the document is considered confidential – I don’t want to put myself in more trouble with the University). All mistakes were allowed for journal correction under close supervision of Vice President for Research William Gern and the investigation committee. I also submitted a monthly report to the research office and the committee to update all my ongoing research. Since I have no further publication issues since the last investigation, I hope that the University RIO won’t keep going back to the same issues to use more evidence of the same nature for retraction. Honestly some of the current 2012 Hypertension misconduct (listed in your May 25 letter) may not be real or it was deemed insignificant by the 2014-2015 committee (such as using same loading control in Fig. 6). Nonetheless, I am happy to make such corrections since we did run a few more loading controls for various proteins in our study.
5. For 2012 Hypertension, Fig. 7 Akt band is the same as GAPDH for GSK3 beta. First of all, this figure presents ratio between phosphorylated and non-phosphorylated proteins (loading control is a non-factor in conclusion). There is no reason to make up data trying to alter conclusion. Yes indeed these two look to be the same. Although a closer examination can tell difference between the two bands. These may be related to repobing (that the first antibody was not removed affectively by the detergents, this is part of the reason for running loading control separately in old days)



1. For 2012 Hypertension (Fig. 5), I think there may be indeed a sign for gel splicing in PGC1alpha although this can be caused when a student tried to clean up the gel background (this is not allowed now, although it was a bad practice 12-15 years ago). In the magnified version, I could not see any abnormality for UCP-2. The background looks normal for both gels. The committee carefully examined this gel and failed to notice irregularity. Again, representative gels were only run after the summary graph is generated (using samples that best represent the value in that group – thus representative gels were not counted again in the excel sheet and are not a part of the summary). My apology for not catching this in 2014-2015.
2. The recent investigation was for a complain for an authorship dispute for students not in my lab. No intentional data making or misconduct was found for me. I don’t know if this retraction reflects a continued sanction on me from the research integrity officer. Our RIO was investigating my "conflict of interest" with China at the same time (due to my connection with China). During the investigation, my lab was closed and I was suspended (teach and research). I took all the needed punishment for such mistake including closure of research lab (one week after receiving a joint new R01). I hope AHA would not punish more bright junior scientists on these papers for my mistakes.
3. The recent retraction requests (from University of Wyoming) were allowed to correct after journals collected original data and did their own assessment (PMID 24368095; 24376112). I am including all original Western gels used in these two papers.
4. The 2012 Hypertension was submitted during a time frame when first author Dr. Zhang just delivered her daughter and was away from the lab. Several junior students helped her for representative gel assembly (while I failed to provide proper supervision). This may be the main reason for multiple gel issues in this work. One of which was Nan Hu was later found to duplicate image between publications (on the record – see attached file from graduate director). Mr. Hu was terminated from the program in 2017 for once again doing such misconduct.
5. Hypertension sent a letter to the Fourth Military Medical University 8 years ago for this irregularity and I request a second option being sought if needed. Once again I am terribly sorry for my mistakes12-15 years ago and thank you for your consideration.

Sincere Yours –

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