

GSK fires Chinese R&D head for publishing fraud data in Nature

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Singapore: GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) has fired the head of its Chinese R&D unit, Dr Jingwu Zhang, after it was found in a probe that he had fabricated data in a 2010 scientific paper on multiple sclerosis (MS). Ironically the paper was published in the prestigious journal, Nature Medicine.

GSK revealed that it had been tipped off about the data fabrication a few weeks ago, and after looking into the allegations has "established that certain data in the paper were indeed misrepresented". GSK has recommended the journal to retract the article at the earliest.

Dr Jingwu Zhang, who served as a senior vice president in GSK's Shanghai R&D unit, has been let go, while another scientist has resigned and three others have been placed on administrative leave, while the company continues its investigation.

The paper in question examined the role of specialized T cells in MS and was from early-stage, preclinical research that did not directly involve patients. The study claimed to have found evidence that differences in receptor for the cytokine interleukin-7 (IL-7) could place some individuals at elevated risk for developing MS. However, the data said to come from cells taken from MS patients was either recorded as coming from healthy donor cells, or could not be documented at all. Dr Zhang's work focused on the effect of IL-7 on a subset of T lymphocytes known as T helper 17 (TH17) cells, but other research groups have suggested that the cytokine is more likely to be exerting effects via the TH1 subgroup.

Dr Zhang, was educated in Harvard and joined GSK in June 2007. He was the founding director of the Shanghai-based Institute of Health Sciences and has served as director of the Shanghai Institute of Immunology.