

NIH scientist is under investigation

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A U.S. House committee is reportedly investigating whether a senior government scientist improperly gave information to a pharmaceutical firm.

Specifically, the House Committee on Energy and Commerce wants to determine whether a National Institute of Mental Health branch chief gave Pfizer Inc. human-tissue specimens while receiving several hundred thousand dollars in compensation, The Wall Street Journal reported Tuesday.

Committee investigators, in a 26-page report, say Trey Sunderland gave Pfizer more than 3,000 NIH samples of human spinal fluid and plasma taken from patients with Alzheimer's disease and from volunteers without the affliction in return for \$285,000.

Sunderland's lawyer, Robert Muse, issued a statement this week saying: "Dr. Sunderland acted legally and ethically in his role at NIH. There is no connection between his receiving funds from Pfizer and Pfizer's access to any tissue samples."

The report will be used during hearings Tuesday and Wednesday into NIH policies, the newspaper said.

Pfizer told the Journal the payments were reasonable and customary for a doctor of Sunderland's stature and experience and were permitted under NIH rules in effect at the time. NIH has since banned outside payments to its researchers.

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