

Researcher pleads guilty to taking fees

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A U.S. scientist working on Alzheimer's has pleaded guilty to accepting consulting fees and travel expenses from a drug manufacturer without proper approval.

As part the agreement reached Friday, Pearson Sunderland III, chief of geriatric psychiatry of the National Institute of Mental Health, will be sentenced to two years of supervised probation and must forfeit \$300,000, the Baltimore Sun said. Charged with conflict of interest, Sunderland admitted to accepting about \$285,000 from Pfizer Inc. without authorization.

The institute is a part of the National Institutes of Health, which has said the arrangements between private companies and agency scientists was the worst scandal in the agency's history.

NIH officials said more than 40 scientists were thought to have engaged in outside, fee-based relationships with private companies. Most were disciplined internally or retired, agency officials said.

Rep. John D. Dingell, D-Mich., expected to lead the House Energy and Commerce Committee in January, said the case raises questions about NIH management.

"Sunderland remained on the payroll for years after NIH was given information from this committee about this conflict," Dingell said in a statement. "Will a criminal conviction for conflict of interest be enough to get someone fired from NIH?"

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