

Probe into faked studies rocks medical community

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A trail-blazing anesthesiologist, whose research shaped pain-relief for millions around the world, has been fabricating data for more than a decade, a hospital where he once practiced claimed Saturday.

Massachusetts-based doctor Scott Reuben is accused of producing at least 21 crooked research papers, some of which talked-up drugs made by a [pharmaceutical firm](#) that gave him research grants.

"The reports contained fabricated data that was created solely by Dr Reuben," said Jane Albert, a spokeswoman for the Baystate Medical Center, where Reuben once practiced.

If proven, the discovery would be one of the biggest cases of medical [research fraud](#) on record -- spanning at least a decade and implicating potentially dozens of supposedly peer-reviewed articles.

According to journal [Anesthesia](#) & Analgesia at least 21 articles are in question dating back to 1996.

The journal's editor Steven Shafer said the discovery could prove a body blow to the field. "Doctors have been using (his) findings very widely. His findings had a huge impact on the field."

Although Baystate said there were no allegations involving patient care, Shafer cautioned against ruling out practical repercussions.

"We have to be open to the possibility there was patient injury. Nothing is without risk."

Reuben, 50, had been a high-profile proponent of anti-inflammatory drugs called COX2 inhibitors, which he claimed reduced post-surgical pain and dependence on steroids and addictive drugs like morphine.

Reuben plugged the use of one COX2 inhibitor -- Celebrex -- along with another drug called Lyrica, both manufactured by US-based pharmaceutical giant Pfizer Inc., as well as another anti-inflammatory drug made by Merck.

Anesthesia & Analgesia, where some of Reuben's work had been published, said he had received research grants from Pfizer and is a member of its speaker's bureau.

In a statement, Pfizer spokeswoman Sally Beatty said the firm was "not involved in the conduct of any of these independent studies or in the interpretation or publication of the study results."

"It is very disappointing to learn about Dr Scott Reuben's alleged actions," the company said.

Reuben's work first aroused suspicion when he submitted two abstracts for an annual Baystate research conference.

Assessors discovered that the data contained in the reports had not been cleared with the hospital's review board.

The investigation which began in spring last year "eventually uncovered an extensive history of fabrication dating back to 1996," Baystate's Jane Albert told AFP.

The 21 studies that have been discredited deal with anesthesia used in post-operative care ranging from knee to spinal surgery.

Reuben has been placed on leave since around May last year and is barred from "research and education activities at Baystate for at least ten years," Albert said.

Baystate has ruled out the involvement of other researchers. Another doctor whose name appears on some of the reports, told Scientific American Reuben had forged his signature on submission papers.

Reuben gained his medical degree at the State University of New York, and was thought to be a pioneer of multimodal analgesia -- which looks at pain relief combining a range of drugs.

Baystate said Reuben had "cooperated fully" with their investigation.

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