

## **AIDS research team in US loses \$1.38M grant (Update)**

July 8 2014, by David Pitt

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An AIDS research team at Iowa State University will not get the final \$1.38 million payment of a National Institutes of Health five-year grant after a team member admitted last year to faking research results, the NIH said Tuesday.

One of the members of the research team, Dong-Pyou Han, a native of South Korea, has pleaded not guilty in federal court to four counts of making false statements in research reports. He is free on bond awaiting trial scheduled for Sept. 2.

The research team, led by biomedical sciences professor Michael Cho, was awarded \$6.8 million to be paid over five years by the NIH, but it won't see the last payment. The team previously received grants totaling \$7.6 million.

The university has agreed to repay the government \$496,000 for Han's salary and other costs tied to his employment at ISU during the research. Han may not apply for or receive grants from the U.S. government for three years, the NIH said, but Cho's team and other researchers at ISU can.

"NIH makes funding decisions based on scientific merit of the proposed research to eligible organizations/institutions. The researchers are eligible to apply for future NIH grant funding through their institutions just as other researchers may apply," the agency said in an emailed statement.

University spokesman John McCarroll said the team, which consists of 10 researchers, has sufficient funding to continue its work.

He said Cho continues to be a respected researcher and people seem to understand he was not aware of faked lab work. Cho did not immediately respond to messages for comment.

According to the indictment filed last month in U.S. District Court in Des Moines, Han's misconduct dates to when he worked at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland under Cho, who was leading a team testing an experimental HIV vaccine on rabbits.

Starting in 2008, Cho's team received initial NIH funding. Cho reported soon that his vaccine was causing rabbits to develop antibodies to HIV, which was considered a major breakthrough in HIV/AIDS vaccine research by NIH officials and the research community.

Iowa State recruited Cho in 2009, and his team—including Han—soon received a five-year grant to continue the research. The team reported progress until a group of researchers at Harvard University found in January 2013 the promising results had been achieved with rabbit blood spiked with human antibodies.

An ISU investigation pinpointed Han leading him to write in a Sept. 30, 2013, confession letter that he started the fraud in 2009 "because he wanted (results) to look better" and that he acted alone.

"I was foolish, coward, and not frank," he wrote.

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