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Doctor Admits Pain Studies Were Frauds, Hospital Says

By [GARDINER HARRIS](#)

In what may be among the longest-running and widest-ranging cases of academic fraud, one of the most prolific researchers in anesthesiology has admitted that he fabricated much of the data underlying his research, said a spokeswoman for the hospital where he works.

The researcher, Dr. Scott S. Reuben, an anesthesiologist in Springfield, Mass., who practiced at Baystate Medical Center, never conducted the clinical trials that he wrote about in 21 journal articles dating from at least 1996, said Jane Albert, a spokeswoman for Baystate Health.

The reliability of dozens more articles he wrote is uncertain, and the common practice — supported by his studies — of giving patients aspirinlike drugs and neuropathic pain medicines after surgery instead of narcotics is now being questioned.

Paul Cirel, a lawyer for Dr. Reuben, said that he could not discuss the case because Baystate had investigated it as part of a confidential peer-review process. Baystate officials “were aware of extenuating circumstances,” Mr. Cirel said.

The drug giant Pfizer underwrote much of Dr. Reuben’s research from 2002 to 2007. Many of his trials found that [Celebrex](#) and Lyrica, Pfizer drugs, were effective against postoperative pain.

“Independent clinical research advances disease treatments and improves the lives of patients,” said Raymond F. Kerins Jr., a Pfizer spokesman. “As part of such research, we count on independent researchers to be truthful and motivated by a desire to advance care for patients. It is very disappointing to learn about Dr. Scott Reuben’s alleged actions.”

Drug companies routinely hire community physicians to conduct studies of already-approved medicines. In some cases, prosecutors have charged companies with underwriting studies of little scientific merit in hopes of persuading doctors to prescribe the medicines more often.

“When researchers are beholden to companies for much of their income, there is an incredible tendency to get results that are favorable to the company,” said Dr. Jerome Kassirer, a former editor of [The New England Journal of Medicine](#) and the author of a book about conflicts of interest.

Dr. Reuben’s activities were spotted by Baystate after questions were raised about two study abstracts that he filed last spring, Ms. Albert said. The health system determined that he had not received approval to conduct human research, Ms. Albert said.

Baystate investigators determined that Dr. Reuben had concocted data for 21 studies, and the health system asked the journals in which those studies were published to withdraw them.

Dr. Steve Shafer, the editor in chief of Anesthesia & Analgesia, which published many of the papers, said he was considering withdrawing any study in which Dr. Reuben served a pivotal role.

“He was one of the most prolific investigators in the area of postoperative pain management,” Dr. Shafer said. His fraud “sets back our knowledge in the field tremendously.”

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