

A Mistaken Accusation

Dr. Manato is a researcher interested in how medicines such as antidepressants and addicting drugs affect the brain. This is a critical problem involving huge resources. He recently did something very useful by developing a procedure that showed where these drugs acted in the brain. He combined existing experimental procedures into a newer one that avoided the pitfalls of the existing ones. It was a significant advance, one that will allow many new studies of the brain and how it responds to medications. A colleague of Dr. Manato, Dr Penvy, knew about the work and had previously worked with Dr. Manato. Accordingly, Dr. Manato sent a copy of the procedure to Dr Penvy well before it was published and available to everyone. Dr. Manato sent it as a courtesy to an interested colleague.

But Dr Penvy, for whatever reason, attacked the paper, saying that all of the proper citations were not included. Because of this, Dr. Manato was added to a list of people to be sanctioned or investigated. This action caused much trouble for Dr. Manato, and great emotional distress, especially because the citations were in fact included in the paper, but apparently missed by Dr Penvy.

When Dr Penvy discovers her mistake, what are her ethical obligations to Dr. Manato and everyone else? Should she take advantage of the poor position of Dr. Manato and publish her own work on the topic? Should she concoct lies that support her error? Or does she assist Dr. Manato in his distress? She may say that some of this is Dr. Manato's own fault; even if partly true, what are her ethical obligations regarding her error?