

The American Diabetes Association (ADA) retracts our publications Diabetes 2006;55:2455–2462 and Diabetes 2006;55:2713–2722

Four completed independent investigations from three institutions between 2015-2019, but also ADA's own two investigations on the same matters from 2015 and 2017 concluded no data falsification/no amendments in these papers. The American Diabetes Association acts against their own publication policy, which states that retraction is only appropriate if there is a formal finding of misconduct.

ADA contradicts the conclusion of four completed investigations

On January 13, 2020 we have received notice from the ADA on our publications in Diabetes 2006. With both retraction notes, the ADA not only contradicts the conclusion of four completed independent investigations from three institutions between 2015-2019, but also its own investigations from 2015 and 2017.

We fully disagree with the two retractions and requested immediate retraction of these online publications and a discussion with the ADA on that matter.

Instead of a response to our appeal letter, the ADA had suddenly published a different retraction note on the Diabetes 2006;55:2455–2462 paper one day later without even informing us on this change, which includes a previous accusation, which had also been already investigated and cleared by the University of Bremen in 2016 as well as by the ADA itself at the time.

In the retraction notes, the ADA informs that on the basis of its review, the "ESP has determined that the concerns cited below are valid and that these instances of potential image duplication compromise the overall reliability of the study".

When anonymous accusations on these papers occurred in public in 2014, I immediately requested their in-depth investigation by the University of Bremen. In parallel, also University of Zurich investigated the issues independently. Both investigations (first completed by the University of Zurich in October 2015; second by the University of Bremen in October 2016) have concluded with no findings of data manipulation nor misconduct. Instead, each of these investigations closed with no further action taken. Also, a 3rd independent investigation by the German Research Foundation (DFG) concluded no data falsification in these papers. Nevertheless, the diabetes papers had been flagged with concern on the reported issues.

Together with the University's official conclusion statements, we then informed the ADA about the results of the two investigations and requested the withdrawal of the concerns. We received the following confirmation letters:

In 2015, the ADA informed us that our response to the allegations were satisfactory and no further review/action is required (this covers #3 and #1-3 of retraction notes on the 2006;55:2713–2722 and 2006;55:2455–2462 papers, respectively).

In 2017, after the end of the Bremen investigation, the ADA again informed us, that in response to the previous investigation, the ADA cannot withdraw the concerns but will not publish a further amendment on the paper (this covers #1-2 of the retraction note on the 2006;55:2713–2722).

Through ongoing anonymous accusations and pressure on the same cases, the University of Zurich re-investigated the issues raised, including the two 2006 diabetes papers. In November 2019, the investigation again concluded with no findings of data manipulation nor misconduct.

These investigations and responses cover #1-3, respectively, in both retraction notes.

On this basis, the justification for the Expressions of Concern pursuant to the COPE guidelines has passed. Furthermore, because the outcome of the investigations was that there have been no findings of research misconduct, there was the cause for the Expressions of Concern to be replaced with exonerating statements.

The retraction is in full contrast to three independent investigations of two Universities as well as to the official result of two ADA's own previous investigations. Now the ADA even comes up with a new, very similar allegation on a western blot band (#4 in both retraction notes), but

we had never been given a chance to respond to such fully false accusation. According to the COPE guidelines, we should have had the chance to be informed and got the opportunity to respond. This issue is particularly surprising, because again, the bands of the respective western blots are not identical; they don't even look similar and have simply no resemblance.

ADA acts against ICMJE and COPE guidelines for publication ethics

With the two retraction letters, the ADA acts against their own publication policy, which states that retraction is only appropriate if there is a formal finding of misconduct, and notes that "any withdrawal or retraction published in the journal will meet the requirements established by the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE)" as well as violates the Committee on Publication Ethics ("COPE") guidelines.

If the ADA does not agree with the conclusions of multiple investigations by three institutions and ignores the results of previous forensic analyses, this should be made clear in any Expression of Concern or Retraction note, with reasons given. Furthermore, if they choose not to respect the findings of their own previous investigation this too must be mentioned with some form of justification.

Guidelines for storage of scientific data

The data and scientific conclusions of both publications have been fully confirmed and reproduced independently; by us as well as by many other laboratories. Nevertheless, we were unable to retrieve the requested original blots of this work from data storage devices, as they all stem from experiments >15 years ago and authors have moved their laboratories several times to different institutes.

Therefore, general research guidelines of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) define a data storage requirement of the respective field of research; which is in the discipline of basic research in diabetes at least 5 years by *Diabetologia* (<http://diabetologia-journal.org/about-the-journal/journal-policies/>), 7 years by *Diabetes* (<http://www.diabetesjournals.org/content/journal-policies#dataaccess>) and 10 years by the German Research Foundation and the University of Bremen (10 years; https://www.dfg.de/download/pdf/dfg_im_profil/reden_stellungnahmen/download/empfehlung_wiss_praxis_1310.pdf and https://www.uni-bremen.de/fileadmin/user_upload/sites/referate/referat06/3..1.4.FehIV-VerfO_Neufassung_2017.pdf).

We are all very upset and surprised about such decision from a peer-reviewed journal of the ADA: *Diabetes*.

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on behalf of the co-authors