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Mass General Repays Nearly \$1 Million; Researcher Settles FCA Allegations With \$215,000 Fine

A former Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) researcher who was the principal investigator on a 2014 NIH award of \$939,495.27 and allegedly fabricated data in the award application has agreed to pay the government \$215,000. The payment resolves potential violations of the False Claims Act (FCA) that resulted from Sam W. Lee's alleged research misconduct, the Department of Justice (DOJ) announced Aug. 6. MGH conducted an "internal review," according to the settlement, and then "stopped drawing federal funds for [Lee's award] and voluntarily disclosed to the United States that Dr. Lee allegedly submitted grant applications to NIH containing inauthentic data. MGH repaid NIH the full amount of funds it received, \$939,495.27." It is not clear when MGH's repayment and the disclosure were made.

DOJ said in its announcement that Lee "altered the experiment descriptions in two of the figures, falsifying the results of the experiments," and "falsified a third figure by horizontally flipping the image and thus mislabeling the results in the application." The government said the "underlying experiments for certain figures included in the grant application" were conducted by a fellow who was no longer part of Lee's lab when the funding application was submitted to NIH. Lee's payment was described in the settlement as not restitution but reflective of a negotiated amount based on his financial means. The settlement states that the government's full claim against Lee is "\$1,878,990.54, less any payments received" as part of the agreement. The settlement also requires that Lee not "make or permit to be made any public statement denying, directly or indirectly," any of the allegations, nor "creating the impression that the [allegation] is without factual basis." To date, the HHS Office of Research Integrity (ORI) has not made a misconduct finding against Lee.

[Link to DOJ announcement](#)

[Link to settlement](#)

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