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Report on Research Compliance Volume 18, Number 5. April 22, 2021 First ORI Annual Report in Years Emerges; Graphics-Laden Format Lacks Historical Data

By Theresa Defino

For the first time since 2012, the HHS Office of Research Integrity (ORI) issued[1] an annual report, but for those used to previous updates or looking for useful details, it may prove to be a disappointment. Covering fiscal year (FY) 2020, the report consists mostly of graphics and presents essentially a snapshot of activities. Missing are trend data and any information from past years' actions. ORI has a unique and crucial role in the research world: It investigates research misconduct, defined as fabrication, falsification or plagiarism, in the billions of dollars of studies supported by NIH and other Public Health Service (PHS) agencies.

The new report also contains no analysis of the agency's findings of research misconduct and omits other categories of information included in past reports, such as the number of allegations investigated by PHS-funded institutions. Those interested in ORI's activities and findings also can't do their own analysis as ORI removed all of the previous annual reports and has no plans to put them back, *RRC* has learned.

Agency officials also told *RRC* they intend to release some additional data when analyzed; in other instances, they said the information is unavailable.

But Alan Price, a former ORI official who is now a research integrity consultant, told*RRC* the new document fails to fulfill the historical purpose of the annual report—helping to educate research integrity officials (RIOs).

Even in its skeletal form, the surprise posting of the report in February may signal more of a return to normalcy for ORI. Despite its critical job of overseeing integrity in the government's largest research portfolio, the agency has been battered over the last decade by leadership vacancies and allegations of malfeasance by a former director who was removed after two controversial years in the post.

March 2020 marked the first time since 2016 that ORI's four leadership positions were filled by permanent appointees.[2] At that time, Elisabeth Handley was named director after serving as interim director beginning in July 2019, and ORI announced the appointment of Karen Wehner as director of the Division of Education and Integrity (DEI), a post that had remained open for four years. Alex Runko has been the director of ORI's Division of Investigative Oversight (DIO) since July 2019. The fourth leader is Wanda Jones, ORI deputy director and associate director for research and scientific integrity. Jones has led the agency during times of vacancies before being named to her positions permanently in 2019.

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