

Report on Research Compliance Volume 17, Number 7. June 25, 2020 To Stop Protection of Harassers, NIH 'Must Sanction Institutions'

By Theresa Defino

Virologist Angela Rasmussen, an associate research scientist at Columbia University, is perhaps one of the strongest voices today advocating for an end to sexual harassment and other inappropriate behaviors in academia. In December, she and fellow members of a working group advising the NIH Advisory Committee to the Director (ACD) recommended steps to combat harassment. At last month's virtual gathering of the ACD, Carrie Wolinetz, NIH associate director for science policy and acting chief of staff to NIH Director Francis Collins, gave an update on NIH's activities since the previous meeting at the end of 2019.^[1] RRC contacted Rasmussen for her view on what has transpired since December.

What do you think of NIH's progress in implementing the working group's recommendations?

I am not pleased that progress has been slow, but I also understand why it has been slow: the pandemic has disrupted all activities at NIH, and I know that, in particular, Dr. Wolinetz worked very hard to push the revised guidance forward. While I'm pleased that some progress was made, I'd add that this essentially addresses only one of the recommendations.

I was glad to hear that other recommendations are in the works, including new funding mechanisms, and that more problem PIs [principal investigators] have been removed from grants. But there is a lot more that remains to be done, both to hold harassers and the institutions that protect them accountable, as well as provide mechanisms to restore the careers and livelihoods of those who have been harmed by them.

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