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Integrity Training: Conflicting Practices

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N. H. Steneck rightly pleads for global research integrity training, although he acknowledges that “improved and expanded global [responsible conduct of research] training will not necessarily reduce misconduct or improve integrity in research” (1). Research suggests that mentoring and a lab's actual practice of integrity—or the lack thereof—are more important than formal training in research integrity (2).

We analyzed European guidance documents on research integrity and misconduct (3). Most guidance documents propose, without providing much detail, that education in good research practices should be part of research training. However, there is no consensus across Europe about the content, format, timing, or frequency of such courses, nor is there a common view on who needs training and who qualifies to lead the training. What level of student or researcher should training target? What kind of training could help professors, who heavily influence the culture in which their researchers work (2)? Is there evidence that training adults promotes integrity or prevents dishonest behavior in other areas of life?

Successful guidance for researchers should entail a harmonized strategy to stimulate research integrity. Further research will tell us whether this strategy should focus on training researchers or on the broader goal of creating a culture of integrity in research environments.

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