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Fostering a Culture of Responsible Lab Conduct

ANN M. PEIFFER*, **PAUL J. LAURIENTI**, and **CHRISTINA E. HUGENSCHMIDT**

Department of Radiology, Wake Forest University School of Medicine, Winston-Salem, NC 27157, USA.

There is much debate and research devoted to determining the best practice for teaching responsible conduct of research (RCR) to trainees as federally required (1, 2). The majority of institutional programs require trainees (i.e., graduate students and postdoctoral fellows) to attend instruction isolated from the laboratory. However, laboratory behavior is our field's "hidden curriculum," and the principal investigator and senior laboratory staff represent the professional role models that trainees see on a daily basis, whether good or bad (3). At Wake Forest, over the past 3 years, we have implemented a program of 15-minute discussions that takes place after our weekly journal club. This amounts to about 11 to 12 hours of training per year. Each laboratory member takes a turn selecting a topic, many of which are also being discussed among scientists, policy-makers, and taxpayers. All laboratory personnel attend, and discussions include a variety of viewpoints as well as discourse on the policies for best practices within the laboratory. We believe that by moving the ethical discussion into the laboratory environment and empowering individual scientists at all seniority levels to actively participate in expanding their own awareness of RCR issues facing research and science policy, we can change the culture of the laboratory itself for the better.

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*To whom correspondence should be addressed. apeiffer@wfubmc.edu.