



Leadership Discussion Guide: Pain Levels Lab

You hire a research assistant to help you in your pain levels lab based on their knowledge and training when it comes to children. The assistant was to get data conserving pain levels from the children after they wake up from their surgery. The research assistant then voiced concern about not being allowed in the hospital and you specifically remember emailing the staff of the hospital to allow the research assistant access. Later on, it was found the assistant was rarely there when the children woke up. When the assistant was there, the methods differed. What should you do?

Decision Making Framework:

- 1) List the issues raised by the 2MC.
- 2) What rules or regulations apply to the situation?
- 3) What questions will help you open up the problem?
- 4) What resources could you use or consult to help you make a decision?
- 5) What are your options and how does each option affect others involved in the situation?
- 6) What would you do after considering all of these and in light of your own values?

Issues

Data falsification
Potential problems with data keeping
What do you really know?
Do you have other options for work?
Whistleblowing: should you tell?

Resources

Campus and federal regulations
Research integrity officer on campus
Mentor
Colleagues
National ethics center website

Rules and Regulations

Federal research integrity regulations
University's regulations

Options

Fire the research assistant
Talk to the research integrity officer on your campus
Talk to the visiting researcher in question
Talk to adviser or other trusted mentor



Questions

Have you done anything wrong?

Had the research assistant done anything wrong? What? With what results?

Was the research assistant given everything needed to do the research?

Were there impediments that delayed the assistant?

If you were an outsider looking into the situation how would you deal with yourself and the research assistant?

How would you ensure that reflecting and resolving issues are being prioritized rather than avoiding responsibility?

How would the assistant know when the children were going to wake up after the surgery?

If the methods used to code the pain levels of children were different than the ones you instructed then is it the fault of the research assistant or could it be a communication error you did not account for?

If this situation has shown itself then could there be a need to refine hiring processes?

What is the source of funding for this project?

Is there any possibility that you could retreat to your Ph.D. lab to regroup?

Takeaway Lessons:

1) Information Gathering

You have an idea of what happened but you don't know if the person genuinely confused or actively trying to sabotage the data. You would need more information before going forward.

2) Seeking Resources

You may need advice before you take the next step. Do you have colleagues that have gone through a similar situation? Ask colleagues if your instructions were clear or if there is possible confusion. Does your new camps have an ombudsperson who might be able to provide confidential advice?

3) Asking Questions

Once you have gathered the facts so you have a fuller sense of the situation, One option is to talk with the research assistant based on what you have learned. You should rehearse these questions so you can ask them in a low-key, professional affect, without making charges. Depending on how your fact-finding goes, you may want to have someone else present when you ask these questions.

4) Follow the Rules for Having a Dispute Professionally

Before you have your conversation with the visiting faculty member you should read and absorb the rules for having a dispute professionally.

Next Steps:

After you have spent an adequate amount of time trying to understand the situation holistically, Then you will have a decision to make. First have you done everything to ensure the success of the research assistant. Will you keep the research assistant or will you fire the research assistant. You have every right to fire the assistant if they fabricated data but why did they have to go to that length. If you decide to keep the research assistant then what will you do to ensure that the behavior will change into a more positive and beneficial behavior. If you decide to fire the research assistant then what steps will you take and what checks will you put into place to ensure that this problem does not happen again.

What Really Happened:

The research assistant was fired and not given a letter of recommendation.

