

President's Report

June 12, 2013

Dear Colleagues,

The Molecular Biology Society of Japan (MBSJ) has always actively strived to prevent scientific misconduct among its members. However, newspapers reported in April of last year that Professor Shigeaki Kato resigned from his position at the University of Tokyo due to his role as a supervisor of a research team that published some paper they later retracted over allegations of data manipulation.

In due consideration of the fact that our society appointed Prof. Kato in FY2007 as a member of our working group on issues in the education of young scientists, the MBSJ Board of Directors has been earnestly investigating the cause of this incident and formulating measures to prevent similar improprieties by our members in the future. Below is an outline of our efforts to investigate the incident and develop effective countermeasures.

1. In order to examine the incident's cause and possible countermeasures, we need to first understand precisely what has happened.

Under our current system, allegations of scientific misconduct by members are investigated by the university with which they are affiliated. To date, however, we have not received any reports from the University of Tokyo regarding their investigation of the incident in question.

We have already sent two letters to the University of Tokyo requesting them to disclose the findings of their inquiry. The content of the first letter, dated November 8, is posted on our website.

After sending the first letter, we obtained information indicating that Prof. Kato was correcting several papers in which various problems had been identified. Therefore we sent the University of Tokyo another letter dated December 27, to ask them to confirm the veracity of that information. We also repeated our request for them to report at their earliest opportunity the findings of their investigation, which is solely with respect to the question of whether scientific misconduct took place and should be handled as a different issue from any disciplinary action that might be taken against those involved in the incident. However, their response was that the investigation was still underway. We plan to strongly reiterate our request for an inquiry on the facts of the case and a report on the findings made.

We will use the information requested as the basis for our own examination of the cause of the incident and preventive measures that can be taken.

2. Although we had still been unable to determine the facts of the incident, we used the 35th annual meeting of the MBSJ in December last year as an opportunity to host an emergency forum entitled "Thinking about Scientific Misconduct: From the Perspective of the Principle Investigator, and from the Perspective of Young Scientists" (this was

organized by the executive members of the 17th Board of Directors). This forum included discussions of the actions that universities, scientific societies, and scientists should take to eradicate scientific misconduct and deal with similar incidents.

The members who joined in the forum shared many frank, sincere opinions and suggestions on the actions that the MBSJ should take. I warmly thank everyone for offering their input.

Looking back, there were various ways that we could have made the forum a more effective gathering. For instance, since it was convened in an urgent manner, some members did not receive advance notice, and many members were unable to attend because a schedule conflict with poster presentations. In the future, we will seek to avoid such shortcomings so that we can more fully garner the opinions of our members.

3. Since then, the Board of Directors has repeatedly discussed matters such as the request to the University of Tokyo for an inquiry and disclosure of the findings, how to disseminate information pertaining to the aforementioned forum, and the course of action that should be taken.

At a special session held on March 30 this year, the Board unanimously approved the attached statement as a declaration of our intent to go beyond dealing with the incident involving Prof. Kato by stepping up our efforts to prevent scientific misconduct.

The Board of Directors' statement will serve as a set of guiding principles for future action to be taken by the MBSJ. There may be other important points that it does not address, so we welcome all members to offer their feedback on how we can improve our society's response.

Please send your opinions on issues regarding scientific misconduct to the following address: info@mbsj.jp

Best regards,

Noriko Osumi
President
Molecular Biology Society of Japan

June 12, 2013

Statement of the MBSJ Board of Directors concerning Scientific Misconduct

Since its inception, the Molecular Biology Society of Japan has earnestly pursued its various endeavors in scientific research, but unfortunately it has come to our attention that one of our members has allegedly engaged in scientific misconduct. Although the findings of the investigation of this case have yet to be released, we have unanimously decided to adopt the following principles as a framework for investigating the causes of scientific misconduct and for developing measures to deal with and prevent such improprieties.

1. The MBSJ, as the largest scientific society in Japan to cover the life sciences, defines as its core principle the promotion of sound scientific research. Accordingly, we will deal strictly with any cases of scientific misconduct.
2. We will re-examine in depth the current system for assessing research results suspected to involve misconduct, and the method of employing professors and other instructors based on that system. We will then make improvements where necessary.
3. We will engage in focused discussion and formulate recommendations regarding specific measures for promoting thorough education on research ethics at universities and other institutions based on the Science Council of Japan's Code of Conduct for Scientists (revised January 2013).
4. We will also discuss and formulate recommendations regarding research ethics education at research institutes, a system for prompt investigation of suspected scientific misconduct, and the establishment of a body for investigating scientific misconduct.

Guided by these principles, we will actively suggest recommendations to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, universities, the Science Council of Japan, and other relevant organizations.

The 18th Board of Directors
Molecular Biology Society of Japan