



Joel M Miller, PhD Eidactics

Medical Arts Building • Suite 210
2000 Van Ness Avenue • San Francisco CA • 94109-3021

email: jmm@eidactics.com
web: eidactics.com
voice: 415-672-0473

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National Institutes of Health
Office of Management Assessment
Division of Program Integrity
6011 Executive Blvd, Suite 601, MSC 7669
Rockville MD 20852

Dear Sir or Madam -

This is a request to investigate apparent misdirection of NIH/NEI funds by the Smith-Kettlewell Eye Research Institute (SKERI) in San Francisco, which is resulting in waste of taxpayer money and damage to a funded project.

Some background: SKERI, once a vigorous, respected center for research in vision physiology and psychophysics has been in steep decline since 2000 due to gross directorial mismanagement. Most of its faculty and staff have left and most of its R01 grants have been lost, along with Core and Training grants. Administrative and support staffs have been decimated, and its recently outfitted physiology building has been shuttered. SKERI no longer supports a workable research environment, and at current income & expense levels will likely run out of money and close its doors within 3 years.

In July of last year, after 30 years as Senior Scientist, I therefore announced my intention to leave SKERI to continue my research at an independent company, Eidactics, contingent on arrangements that would make it possible for me to successfully complete ongoing project R01-EY018633, on which I am joint PI with Alan B Scott. Choosing not to split the grant, SKERI drafted an appropriate subcontract to Eidactics, but would not allow me necessary access to project facilities and personnel remaining at SKERI. Consequently, in January of this year I leased office and lab space suitable to serve as a new center for the project, without SKERI's cooperation on access, and for the past 6 months work on R01-EY018633 has been conducted at Eidactics. My former office at SKERI has stood empty, and the "lab" space SKERI allocated to our project is storage for unused equipment. Disconcertingly, following our move to Eidactics, and against the objections of both Dr Scott and myself, SKERI decided it would not offer the subcontract after all, and would instead force me to remain on their books as an employee in order to continue my work on the project.

I believed I was responsible to inform my NEI Program Manager that my office and our lab had moved from SKERI to Eidactics, and to express my concern that SKERI was nevertheless continuing to claim me as an employee, although I no longer worked there. I wrote to ask if it was proper:

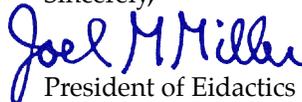
- (1) for SKERI to collect indirect costs (IDCs) associated with my salary, although they were not providing the related services, and
- (2) for Eidactics, where work on R01-EY018633 was actually performed, to be deprived of the IDCs intended to support that work.

NEI Grants Management Staff responded that I should have asked SKERI to contact them about the matter, and apprised SKERI of my complaint. I understand that grant management issues are normally brought by the institution, not the PI, but where the complaint is against the institution, as here, this is clearly unrealistic.

Most of the "Facilities & Resources" cited in our SF424 Grant Application are no longer provided by SKERI. Our animal studies are now sited at Pacific BioLabs (Hercules), computation and instrumentation is done at Eidactics (San Francisco), and clinical work continues to be performed at CPMC (San Francisco). No significant project work is done at SKERI.

Seeking a reasonable perspective on stewardship of NIH funds, I now bring the matter to NIH/OMA/DPI. I ask that you find SKERI to be misrepresenting its resourcing of project R01-EY018633 and misusing its IDCs, while actively damaging the project by depriving it of funds intended for its support. Our project – and the damage to it – are ongoing (see attached draft Progress Report), so I request that you direct appropriate restitution to be made in a timely manner.

Sincerely,


President of Eidactics