Research misconduct

Fabrication and falsification

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You discover that one of your older colleagues in the department has falsified a series of measurements in a minor publication, with no very sensational results. He is close to retirement. When you raise the matter with him, he breaks down crying and blames the head of department’s demand for “at least one paper a year”. If he fails to meet the target, he will not get a share of the “special research resource” and will have to teach 400 hours a year. The man is in poor health and has no great talent for teaching.

What do you do?
Problem clarification

- The falsified results will with very high probability have very little if any further effects on future research or products.

- The focus of the ethical discussion lies on the falsification part and not on any other questionable part of the problem.
Ethical problems in department (Q1)

➢ Keep quiet and let it pass
  ○ Avoid steering up to much trouble.
  ○ May enable further transgressions from the person or others.
  ○ The work in the department will continue as nothing happened.

➢ Tell someone in the university
  ○ May cause a bad atmosphere in the department
  ○ Create a culture of not accepting falsification.
  ○ May affect funding, reputation and so on.
Ethical problems or conflicts due to decision (Q2)

➢ Keep quiet and let it pass
  ○ Goes against the code that you should immediately report such findings.
  ○ In the long run it might affect you if someone realises you knew but did not tell.
  ○ Hard to keep such a secret. (may be against your moral code)

➢ Tell someone in the university
  ○ You do the right thing according to the code.
  ○ Will cause a conflict between you and the person who falsified data.
Alternatives to the solution (Q3)

- Press him to tell someone himself
- Tell the journal and let them handle the problem
Who will be affected by the decision and solution? (Q4)

- Journal
  - Trustworthiness

- University
  - Trustworthiness and research culture

- Research group

- Research area

- The falsifier himself
What values, interests, duties, standpoints and attitudes are involved in the use of your solution and of the possible alternatives? (Q5)

- Honesty
- Prevent research misconduct
- Trust
- Acceptance of falsification
- Emotional
- Interest of appearance
What effects/possibilities/risks may occur with the alternative? (Q6)

➢ Letting it pass
  ○ Affect own mentality-keeping a secret
  ○ It is also kind of misconduct
  ○ Allows for a falsification-maybe he will falsify once again
  ○ Mislead the people who cited this publication
  ○ Keep up appearance for the university, journal and division
  ○ He can continue to work without any influences
What effects/possibilities/risks may occur with the alternative? (Q6)

➢ Telling someone at the University
  ○ Either create mistrust between everyone or join around the unacceptance against falsification
  ○ Huge emotional effects on the falsifier if he needs to resign
  ○ Appearance could be positively and negatively affected
What will you do to make sure that the use of the solution will be optimal? (Q7)

- Analyse the facts/alternatives
- Analyse the consequences (undesired/unintended results? You will sleep soundly?)
- Consulting someone maybe a mentor who is not directly affected by the problem
- Using ethical aspects toolboxes like OLE