

PNAS takes action regarding breach of NIH embargo policy on a PNAS paper

After the paper titled “PKNOX2 gene is significantly associated with substance dependence in European-origin women,” by Xiang Chen, Kelly Cho, Burton H. Singer, and Heping Zhang, published online August 31, 2009 in PNAS, our editors became aware that Dr. Zhang had signed a Data Use Certification indicating his agreement to comply with the NIH Genome-Wide Association Studies Policy for Data Sharing, which applies to the Gene Environment Association (GENEVA) studies, of which the Study of Addiction, Genetics and Environment (SAGE) is a part. Under the policy, investigators agree not to submit findings of the SAGE dataset(s) for publication until September 23, 2009. The PNAS publication clearly violates the SAGE embargo, and the authors

agreed to retract their work in PNAS on September 9, 2009.

Although the scientific community is often viewed as self-correcting, the system failed for this paper. It appears that not all of the coauthors were aware of the embargo agreement, and the referees and the editors did not know that a serious breach of scientific conduct and NIH policy had taken place. This oversight does a disservice to the SAGE investigators on this National Human Genome Research Institute-funded genetic study of addiction, the other investigators who abided by the NIH embargo, and the scientific community.

PNAS takes such breaches in conduct seriously and moved quickly and decisively to address the situation. Because the NIH embargo had been broken and the PNAS paper published, neither ac-

tion could be reversed. The editors and authors, after discussions with NIH and the SAGE principal investigators, agreed that the authors would retract their paper promptly, with a retraction notice appearing online and in print. The paper will not appear in the print edition of PNAS, which will contain only the retraction statement. The watermark “See Retraction Published September 9, 2009” has been added to the paper in PNAS Online, with a link to the retraction notice.

PNAS hopes that this case will emphasize the importance of maintaining the highest ethical standards regarding publication, and will assure the scientific community that sanctions will be levied for those whose actions, whether intentional or through oversight, contradict accepted research practices.

Randy Schekman, *Editor-in-Chief*