Boston University Office of the Provost
Gloria Waters
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October 25th, 2022

Dear Dr. Lauer:

I write in response to your letter of October 20, 2022 concerning the preprint with Dr. Mohsan Saeed as corresponding author (the "Omicron paper").

With the benefit of the NIH guidance you provided, I do not believe that Dr. Saeed and his colleagues should have cited three of the five NIH grants in the Omicron paper. As you will see below, in those three cases, the Omicron paper research neither arose directly from nor is within the scope of those awards. I do believe it was appropriate for them to cite the two S10 instrumentation grants as required by the terms of those awards, although they should have clearly identified those as equipment awards. However, in my professional opinion, in light of the 2021 guidance you referenced, it is not appropriate to cite the three other awards they did.

NIAID R01 AI159945:

The R01 Award was to study the SARS-CoV-2 nsp15 protein and the grant was used, in part, to create a reverse genetics platform needed to generate variants of the virus. Dr. Saeed and his collaborators developed the platform and applied it to the R01 nsp15 studies. Dr. Saeed and his collaborators then used the reverse genetics platform developed under this grant for the work reported in the Omicron paper, but the research described in the Omicron paper did not directly arise from the R01 award, and is not within the scope of the R01 award.

NIH R37 AI087846:

This grant has been awarded to the Cleveland Clinic Florida Research and Innovation Center (CCFRI), and there is no subaward or other funding to Boston University under that award. We understand that researchers at CCFRI developed a modified CPER system that allows for efficient rescue of recombinant SARS-CoV-2 viruses. Dr. Saeed then used the CPER system that was developed under this award, as well as a plasmid encoding a CPER 'linker," in the research reported in the Omicron paper. However, the research in the Omicron paper did not directly arise from the R37 award, and is not within the scope of the R37 award.

1UL1TR001430:

This award to Boston University supports the infrastructure of its Clinical & Translational Science Institute (CTSI) to advance translational and clinical research and training. CTSI, in turn, receives funds from a variety of BU internal sources and distributes seed grants for research projects. A group of collaborating investigators, including Dr. Saeed, received general support to create shared reagents. Dr. Saeed's contributions were to engineer a panel of human cells expressing SARS-CoV-2 receptors to be shared with the scientific community. He used some of those cells in the research reported in the Omicron paper, and so cited the CTSI infrastructure award. However, the research in the Omicron paper did not directly arise from the CTSI award, and is not within the scope of the CTSI award.

NIH S10-OD026983 and NIH SS10-OD030269:

These grants were awarded to Boston University as part of the Instrumentation Grant Program to support purchase of instruments to enhance research on a shared basis. NIH advises that S10 funded instruments should be integrated in a core facility to encourage sharing and foster a collaborative

multidisciplinary environment. The S10-OD026983 award supported the purchase of a Ventana Discovery Ultra, and the S10-OD030269 award supported the purchase of a Vectra Polaris Whole Slide Scanner, both of which are in the NEIDL Comparative Pathology Laboratory, one of the University's core facilities. Those instruments were used in the work reported in the Omicron paper. We will recommend that instead of a general acknowledgment, he use the following acknowledgment which clearly indicates that NIH funded equipment in the core facility was used in the research: "The authors would like to acknowledge the following NIH S10 Shared Instrumentation Grants which funded equipment used in this work: NIH S10-OD026983 and NIH SS10-OD030269."

We appreciate your bringing this matter to our attention. Dr. Saeed is a junior faculty member at the beginning of his publishing career at Boston University, and he took an understandably broad view in acknowledging grants that funded equipment and systems that contributed to his University-funded work. We will ask the authors of the Omicron paper to post an updated version of the pre-print that corrects the acknowledgment section of the manuscript, and to ensure that the corrected acknowledgment section appears in the peer-reviewed version. Further, we will disseminate the 2021 acknowledgement guidance from the NIH to our researchers and provide clearer guidance on appropriate acknowledgment practices.

If you have any other questions or would like to discuss this matter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Gloria Waters

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