Dear [Name],

Freedom of Information request: Definition of research misconduct - 2018/0149 M

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on 22 September 2018 in which you requested the following:

**Your Request:**

Does the MRC consider any of the following practices to constitute research misconduct, with reference to the publication of clinical trial outcomes in academic journals?

1. 'Silent' outcome switching, and/or
2. HARKing, and/or
3. p-hacking

If yes, please:

4. Provide a link to the document(s) defining such conduct as research misconduct
5. Specify since when MRC has considered such conduct to constitute misconduct
6. Specify the range of sanctions that MRC may impose if any instances of such conduct are detected
7. Specify the number of times the MRC has (a) investigated, and (b) imposed sanctions, for such conduct since 22 September 2013

**Our response:**

I can confirm UK Research and Innovation does hold some of the information relevant to your request.

Please see the information relevant to your request below.

The UK Research and Innovation *Policy and Guidelines on Governance of Good Research Conduct* outline the definition of research misconduct which is used by all the research councils, including the MRC. The three terms that you have listed, are recognised as indicators of poor practice that contribute to the problem of reproducibility (for example in the AMS report *Reproducibility and reliability of biomedical research*) but are not included in the *Policy and Guidelines*. The MRC would expect the influence of these practices to be identified and addressed, and their influence on the reported trial findings evaluated, through the peer review and editorial processes associated with journal publication.
Further information regarding the MRC’s expectations for good research practice can be found at the following links:

- Information on the approach taken by UK Research and Innovation regarding research integrity: [https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-and-standards/research-integrity/](https://www.ukri.org/about-us/policies-and-standards/research-integrity/)


- The MRC policies and guidance for researchers: [https://mrc.ukri.org/research/policies-and-guidance-for-researchers/](https://mrc.ukri.org/research/policies-and-guidance-for-researchers/)


- The MRC Policy on Research Misconduct: [https://mrc.ukri.org/documents/pdf/mrc-policy-on-research-misconduct/](https://mrc.ukri.org/documents/pdf/mrc-policy-on-research-misconduct/). Please note that the MRC only investigates allegations of research misconduct relating to its own staff.

These links provide information on definitions, and what action may be taken while allegations of research misconduct are being investigated and if a case were proven.

In addition, the MRC Policy on Open Research Data from Clinical Trials and Public Health Intervention Studies ([https://mrc.ukri.org/research/policies-and-guidance-for-researchers/open-research-data-clinical-trials-and-public-health-interventions/](https://mrc.ukri.org/research/policies-and-guidance-for-researchers/open-research-data-clinical-trials-and-public-health-interventions/)) promotes research transparency and integrity, and requires researchers to publish their clinical trial protocols and plans for statistical analysis prior to a study starting. This requirement would enable readers, peer reviewers and journal editors to identify when practices, such as outcome switching or the development of post-hoc hypotheses, have contributed to the final report and conclusions of a clinical trial.

It is the employers’ responsibility to investigate any allegations of research misconduct, although the MRC does ask to be informed of any investigations that relate to MRC funding, or researchers that have connection to the MRC.

If you have any queries about this response please contact me, or if you are unhappy with the service you have received in relation to your request and wish to request a review of our decision, please write to:

**Complaints Officer**

UK Research and Innovation  
Polaris House  
North Star Avenue  
Swindon  
SN2 1FL  
Email: foi@ukri.org

Please quote the reference number above in any future communications.

If you are still not content with the outcome of the review, you may apply to refer the matter to the Information Commissioner for a decision. Generally, the ICO cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted the review procedure provided by UKRI. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:
Information Commissioner
Wycliffe House,
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Enquiry/Information Line: Between 9am and 5pm Monday to Friday 0303 123 1113 or 01625 545745

Further information about the Office of the Information Commissioner can be found at
http://www.ico.gov.uk/

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted]
UK Research and Innovation, Information Governance Team
Email: foi@ukri.org