Some important ethical issues

• Protection of Human Subjects. (Tuskegee)
• Protection of Animals.
• Conflict of Interests. (Big Pharma)
• Data Management Practices. (Harvard)
• Mentor and Trainee Responsibilities.
• Collaborative Research.
• Authorship and Publication.
• Peer review (papers/grants).
As his first major grant is coming to an end, several important elements of Dr. Sanjay K. research suddenly fall into place. The last series of experiments his graduate student ran clearly link the gene they are studying to a particular type of cancer. His postdoc’s work on the proteins associated with this gene could pave the way for possible cures. With these results in hand, he is finally ready to make a strong case for continued support and, happily, his pending promotion. All he has to do now is publish the results.

A week later, Sanjay’s optimism starts to fade. As might have been expected, his department chair was delighted with his progress, but then suggested that the first paper announcing the result comes out under her name to give it broader circulation. Meanwhile, his postdoc and graduate students have gotten into a heated debate about the order their names should appear on the paper; the university’s public affairs office has asked for a summary of the results for a press release; and the technology transfer office has called telling him to hold all publications until they can evaluate the commercial potential of his work/

- What should Sanjay do?
- Which of these problems should Sanjay tackle first?
- Is there anything he could have done to assure that things went more smoothly when he was ready to publish his results?
Sharon, Ben, and Terra met during a late-night discussion at a professional meeting. They share a common interest in learning disorders but come from different scientific backgrounds. Sharon works at the cutting edge of brain imaging technology. Ben is an educational psychologist interested in pre-school children in inner cities. Terra has been putting her knowledge as a physiologist to work exploring the effects of alternative medicines.

As late night turns to early morning, the newly met trio begins to see benefits from working together and starts sketching out a grant proposal. The scientific ideas quickly fall into place, but some of the logistics raise questions that need answers.

- Who should submit the proposal, through which university?
- Do all three need to get IRB approval to work on the project?
- What will happen if their work has practical applications?

How should they go about answering these questions? Are there other important questions that should be asked as well?
Katherine, a postdoc in Dr. Susan B.’s laboratory, has just had a manuscript accepted for publication in a prestigious research journal, conditional on a few important changes. Most importantly, the editor has requested that she significantly shorten the methods section to save space. If she makes the requested changes, other researchers may not be able to replicate her work.

Asked about the situation, Dr. B. recommends that Katherine go ahead with the changes. After all, if other researchers want more information they can always get in touch. She remains concerned that an inadequate explanation of her methods could lead other researchers to waste time and valuable research dollars attempting to replicate her work.

- Should Katherine make the requested changes?
- Should she be concerned about providing inadequate information to colleagues?
- Is reducing detail in methods sections a reasonable way to go about saving valuable space in journals?
- How can Katherine get definitive answers to these and other questions about the responsible conduct of research?