

**RCR Topic(s):** Peer Review

**Title:** It's Not Fair!

**Case:** Professor Jacqmain has submitted a grant to the *International Council for Biomedical Research* to study contamination of groundwater caused by leaching of discarded medications from landfills, as well as study the effects of that contamination on puberty onset.

- Professor Jacqmain has been on the editorial board of the *Journal of Physiology and Environmental Impact* for two years. It is his first time in this role for any journal. Although he has received praise for his efficiency, many authors feel he is following the guidelines too stringently.
- Professor Gerald Hunter is on the committee that will be reviewing Professor Jacqmain's grant. He has submitted several papers to the *Journal of Physiology and Environmental Impact* in the previous eight months, with only one being accepted after major revisions. Following the most recent rejection, Hunter confronted Jacqmain in a telephone conversation, accusing him of bias against young investigators.
- Professor Kelly Malone is also a member of the committee that will be reviewing Professor Jacqmain's grant. She is aware of the animosity Hunter has for Jacqmain.
- Professors Keaton Young, Mia Othello, and David Randolph are also on the committee reviewing Jacqmain's grant. They are unaware of the tension that exists between Hunter and Jacqmain.

In accordance with Council guidelines, each individual has been assigned grants to review prior to a face-to-face subcommittee meeting. Each reviewer is instructed to identify 50% of the assigned grants for streamlining (streamlined proposals are not recommended for funding). When the subcommittee meets to assess the grants, the applications recommended for streamlining are given swift overviews, including reasons why they should not be considered for funding. Professor Hunter has recommended streamlining for Professor Jacqmain's grant. Hunter claims that Jacqmain's submission lacks relevance, and further indicates that Jacqmain failed to cite the large body of evidence associated with the scientific rationale for the study.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Though Professor Malone does not have solid evidence against Professor Hunter, does she have an obligation to demand a full investigation of the grant, given the

history between Hunter and Jacqmain? Does Malone have an obligation to inform other subcommittee members of the reasoning behind her request for the full investigation?

2. What are the repercussions Malone could face as the possible “whistleblower” in this situation? Would these repercussions be enough to convince her to keep silent, especially if the rest of the subcommittee decided the grant should, indeed be streamlined?
3. What repercussions could Hunter face if it was determined he had deliberately attempted to streamline a grant worthy of funding because of a professional critique that became a personal vendetta?
4. What obligation does the subcommittee have to Professor Jacqmain to inform him of the attempted streamlining?
5. What recourse does Professor Jacqmain have if Malone remains quiet and Hunter succeeds in the streamlining of the grant?
6. How can situations like this be prevented? What is the role of the funding agency, in this case the *International Council for Biomedical Research*?