

Failure to disclose conflicts of interest at heart of CRISPR dispute

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis.

A scientific kerfuffle emerged recently when one of the world's most prominent geneticists published what was meant to be a definitive history of CRISPR — the hot new gene-editing technique — but ended up being what many consider a partisan distortion of scientific ideas and events.

Historical accuracy aside, the dispute raised another issue: just how poorly science deals with conflicts of interest, which are typically disclosed in presentations and journal articles — or are at least supposed to be.

Alas, no disclosures were published in the paper at the heart of the latest controversy. And critics are crying foul.

But before we get into that, first some background. As [STAT reported](#), Eric Lander, head of the Broad Institute, wrote an [essay](#) in the journal Cell describing the dozen or so scientists who first discovered the CRISPR system in bacteria and then repurposed it to edit genomes.

Lander's Broad colleague, [Feng Zhang](#), was the first to publish a [paper](#) demonstrating the use of CRISPR in human and mouse cells. He has since [received more than a dozen potentially lucrative patents](#) related to CRISPR. However, the University of California, Berkeley, says its faculty, not Zhang, made the key discoveries.

It turns out, however, that the lack of disclosure in Cell wasn't really Lander's fault. Lander told STAT: "As Cell has stated, I disclosed both real and perceived conflicts to the journal," including that he has "no personal financial interest (which is the subject of Cell's COI statements) in CRISPR technology" and that "Broad, MIT, and Harvard have patents and patent applications."

Read full, original post: [CRISPR controversy reveals how badly journals handle conflicts of interest](#)