

**IPRA**

Nancy E Joste <NJoste@salud.unm.edu>

Wed 9/8/2021 1:38 PM

To: Nancy E Joste <NJoste@salud.unm.edu>

Cc: Ruth Kief <RKief@salud.unm.edu>

Text from Cheryl Willman on May 7, 2021, 9:50 am

NSubject (No subject)

I am very uncomfortable with discontinuing him and his contract Nancy...he is doing well with many faculty. If we dismissed him I think there would be a lawsuit and he would have justification. I also think we would never have anyone here in 6 months. I truly respect and understand how difficult this has been - for you and for Pathology and I think you have done a terrific job managing it (and as interim Chair), but I also believe that Larry has been a tremendous problem as well...and I think there needs to be more recognition of that from Pathology. I think had Larry not remained - we would likely not have all of the problems we do now. I think CMD was frankly a mess, that projects had not been directed well for some time, and that the student/faculty projects were not well conceived or good projects or well mentored. I think Larry has been uncomfortable that all of this dysfunction and poor quality operations were uncovered...but honestly, most of us have felt this was the case for the past several years. I will try to help you sort this out, but I don't think it is fair that Pathology renege on its commitments to Hakim in terms of support and space. I have never been allowed to do that as Cancer Center director, even when a recruitment did not turn out as we had hoped. One thought I had is we keep him in Pathology but handle him as Cosette. I could be his primary mentor and he could report to me (and Alan) and we could move his admin/program support to the Cancer Center. But you could still have the benefit of any grants he had submitted.  
Cheryl

**From:** [Tudor I. Oprea](mailto:Tudor.I.Oprea)  
**To:** [Hakim Djaballah](mailto:Hakim.Djaballah)  
**Subject:** here it is  
**Date:** Saturday, May 29, 2021 6:14:26 AM

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**From:** Alan E Tomkinson  
**Sent:** Friday, May 28, 2021 8:43 PM  
**To:** Martha C McGrew <[MMcGrew@salud.unm.edu](mailto:MMcGrew@salud.unm.edu)>; Douglas M Ziedonis <[DZiedonis@salud.unm.edu](mailto:DZiedonis@salud.unm.edu)>; Mark L Unruh <[MLUnruh@salud.unm.edu](mailto:MLUnruh@salud.unm.edu)>  
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**Subject:** Dr Djaballah termination

To the HSC leadership

I am writing to express my dismay and concern about the treatment of Dr. Djaballah. Dr. Djaballah was identified by Dr. Sklar as the ideal recruit to replace him as the Director of the Center for Molecular Discovery (CMD). I was then heavily involved in the recruitment of Dr. Djaballah that was time consuming and complex. Key elements of recruitment included evaluation of the CMD staff and sources of financial support for the CMD, in particular extramural funding. This last element took a considerable time because of the complex nature of Dr. Sklar's financial arrangements. It became evident that whilst the cancer center was providing the majority of unrestricted support for the CMD, there was a lack of transparency about the CMD finances, a situation that was aided and abetted by pathology administration. We finally got a handle on the funding and reached an arrangement with Dr. Sklar regarding grant transfers and support for CMD staff that were part of the final LOO.

It was clearly stated in the LOO that Dr. Djaballah as Director of the CMD would have oversight of the CMD in terms of space, resources, operations and developing a strategic vision. Upon joining UNM, there was a transition phase until Dr. Sklar retired at the end of October. During this time, Dr. Sklar started to renege on agreements regarding grant transfers and, in contravention of the LOO, enlisted the Pathology administration to change the efforts of CMD staff on grants. In the LOO, we asked Dr. Djaballah to "upgrade, modernize and integrate existing equipment, establish a new technologic infrastructure and capabilities and **establish more rigorous standard operating procedures that meet GLP standards.**" I highlight the last phrase because the cancer center had significant concerns about the operation of the CMD after the departure of Bruce Edwards. I inspected the laboratory after Dr. Djaballah started. I have seen many laboratories and this was one of the worst. It was an elephant's graveyard of old and dysfunctional equipment. The lab was filthy and it appeared that the benches were never cleaned and that personnel simply moved to another bench when one was trashed. The CMD staff were resistant to Dr. Djaballah's efforts to change lab practices to meet GLP standards. They refused to communicate with him and

ignored his requests implement changes as well to provide access to data for previous and on-going projects in CMD. The inability of Dr. Sklar and the CMD staff to produce a database of previous NIH-funded screens carried out by the CMD is a major concern. While I understand that imposing more rigorous work expectations on lab staff is not going to be popular and most likely underlies the complaints made about Dr. Djaballah, I find it difficult to believe that Dr. Sklar did not encourage the combative and rebellious behavior.

Having known Dr. Sklar for 10 years, his orchestration of a campaign to undermine Dr. Djaballah is entirely consistent with his pattern of behavior. I note that he refers to Nicole Hamblett, a cancer center employee who worked as his CMD manger and now works for Dr. Djaballah as a traitor. Dr. Sklar made several claims that Dr. Djaballah was not allowing him access to equipment and reagents. He provided a long list of these items. Dr. Lidke, Dr. Djaballah and I met to go over this list. The meeting lonely asted 10 minutes because with the exception of 2 or 3 items, they were all available in Dr. Sklar's lab space. A subsequent visit to CMD supervised by pathology administration and scientific leaders was arranged for Dr. Sklar and one of his staff to retrieve couple of items from freezers. Instead of the limited number, the whole Sklar group showed up and refused to follow the requests made by Nicole Hamblett to focus on retrieving the items in question, they spread throughout the space rummaging through fridges and freezers. The Sklar group intimidated and verbally assaulted Nicole, who is also pregnant. A complaint has been filed about what I consider to be this most egregious behavior. The apparent lack of action against the individuals involved raises serious questions about the capability of the HSC administration to deal appropriately with these kind of incidents.

In summary, the CMD, a key component of the cancer center as well as the CTSC, was in disarray. We were fortunate enough to hire a person with an outstanding track record and reputation to revitalize the CMD. The cancer center has invested \$500,000 in equipment as well as substantial other support. However, his efforts have been undermined right from the start by Dr. Sklar and his group through false claims, a lack of cooperation and harassment and intimidation of Dr. Djaballah's staff. While the Cancer center has tried to support Dr. Djaballah and we have repeatedly expressed our concerns to the Department of Pathology about the behavior of Dr. Sklar and his group, it is evident there is a double standard in terms of how Dr, Djaballah and Dr. Sklar are treated by the leadership of the Department of Pathology, who have singularly failed to address the behavior of Dr. Sklar and his group. I do not condone and agree some of the actions taken by Dr. Djaballah but it is evident that he has been subject to extreme provocation and I can tell you that if I had been treated this way upon joining UNM, I would also have retaliated albeit in a different manner. The sending of the termination notification to Dr. Djaballah without discussing with the Cancer center, who pay half of his salary and made the major contribution to his recruitment, shows a remarkable lack of common courtesy, collegiality and respect. It also effectively eliminates the drug discovery efforts of the Cancer Center and CTSC and disrupts growing

collaborations with the main campus and investigators across the HSC campus as well as on-going recruitments. Finally, in my opinion, this action not only puts UNM in significant legal jeopardy but is likely to result in investigations by NIH. I strongly urge you to take the time to reconsider this decision with input from all stakeholders.

Alan Tomkinson  
Associate Director for Basic Research  
University of New Mexico Comprehensive Cancer Center