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HARVARD SUSPENDS DOCTOR FOR FRAUD

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BOSTON, Dec. 15— A rapidly rising young doctor at the Harvard Medical School has admitted that he falsified data in a heart research experiment, and the school has instituted a major investigation to decide how to handle the case, according to the school's dean.

The physician, Dr. John R. Darsee, a research fellow in cardiology at the Brigham and Women's Hospital, was immediately relieved of his post at both the Harvard Medical School and the hospital, said the dean, Daniel C. Tosteson.

Dr. Darsee, whose whereabouts were unknown, had been under consideration for appointments to the medical school faculty and to the leadership of a hospital laboratory, according to other doctors.

The doctor supervising his research, Eugene Braunwald, ordered that all abstracts of Dr. Darsee's work be withdrawn from presentation at the annual meeting of the American Heart Association. In addition, Dr. Braunwald notified the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md., of the scandal, because the research project Dr. Darsee was working on was being done with institute money.

The incident follows several other cases of falsification of data in medical school laboratories in the last few years. There is growing concern about the reliability of scientific experiments. In some of the earlier cases, the doctors responsible for the research were reluctant to admit the fabrications. Motive of the Inquiry

But doctors at Harvard and throughout the large medical community in Boston say they see this incident as an attempt by Dean Tosteson and Dr. Braunwald to find a way to police scientific research properly and to set up guidelines in a hitherto murky area.

Dean Tosteson said the episode began when other researchers at the Harvard Medical School accused Dr. Darsee of "the fabrication of research data" during an experiment last May on limiting the damage from heart attacks in animals.

Then, according to a statement released today by Dean Tosteson, "An intense investigation was immediately undertaken in the course of which the individual admitted this serious misconduct."

Dean Tosteson said he did not know the current whereabouts of Dr. Darsee, though all his earlier work and published articles at Harvard have also been put under investigation. Dr. Darsee is not listed in the Boston phone directory.

Other physicians knowledgeable about the case said Dr. Darsee had been promptly suspended by Dr. Braunwald, one of the country's most respected cardiologists. Dr. Braunwald is chairman of the Department of Medicine at both Brigham and Women's Hospital and Beth Israel Hospital, two of the biggest hospitals in Boston, and has written several hundred articles on his research, as well as a new textbook on heart disease. Different From Other Cases

It is unclear whether Dr. Braunwald had co-signed any of the abstracts that had been submitted to the Heart Association and whether they included any of the tainted data.

Asked for comment, Dr. Braunwald said he could confirm that he had suspended Dr. Darsee and ordered the other actions against him, but he said all other comments should come from Dean Tosteson until the investigation is complete.

Other physicians said that in contrast to incidents at some other hospitals, Dr. Braunwald had acted with speed and responsibility and had made no effort to cover up the case. They also said the case was unfortunate because there was general agreement that Dr. Darsee, who did his residency work at Emory University Hospital in Atlanta, was a brilliant and prolific researcher, and that his earlier work was not in question.