Commentary: Failing grades

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The Innocence Project is a network of lawyers and volunteers who during the last 25 years have dedicated themselves to the exoneration of the wrongfully accused and convicted. Through diligent work, these individuals have shown how prosecutorial misdeeds, unreliable witnesses, and even pseudoscience have led many people to spend decades of their lives in prison. One such client, Timothy Bridges, spent 25 years in jail for a crime that he did not commit after an original conviction that was based largely on the imperfect science of hair analysis. Now free because of DNA evidence, Mr Bridges is a prime example of how our reliance on flawed instruments for measuring and deciding outcomes can have dire consequences.

The article in this issue of the *Journal* by Schwarz and colleagues¹ presents a compelling analysis of how our current criteria for measuring primary graft dysfunction is just as flawed as, say, hair analysis. Not only do Schwarz and colleagues¹ demonstrate how infrequently experienced chest radiologists agree on film interpretation when they do not know relevant clinical data, they also show how consensus does not improve when they do have more insight. In addition, they further show how in cases of patients with low Pao₂/inspired oxygen fraction ratios (<200 mm Hg), the variability in chest film interpretation can yield significant fluctuations in primary graft dysfunction scoring. In the end, although the inadequacy of this scoring system may not rise to the level of deciding a given person's fate, the current method for measuring primary graft dysfunction forms the foundation for a large body of literature that assesses risk factors for graft dysfunction and its long-term implications (ie, survival).² Furthermore, its use as a primary study end point has led to the recent US

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Central Message

Flawed methods of judgment have significant downstream implications.

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Food and Drug Administration approval of an expensive portable ex vivo lung perfusion device.³

In any field of science, whether it be forensic or medical science, there is as much value in work that questions perceived wisdom as there is in the discovery of new knowledge. This is particularly true when conclusions are being drawn and crimes adjudicated according to methodology that is dependent on a human being's subjective analysis. When light is shined upon these errors in judgment, as Schwarz and colleagues¹ do here, we bend a bit closer to the ultimate goal—truth.

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