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I believe further research will show that *spin off* was invented not by newsmen but by NASA officials wishing to avoid the unpleasant connotations of the word *fallout*.

Blast off seems to have been carried over into science (fact) writing from science (fiction) writing, rather than having been invented *de novo* by newsmen. Whether *blast off* is "spurious," as McNeill suggests, is a matter of opinion; it is as precise in meaning as the engineer-approved word *liftoff* and a good deal more descriptive.

WILLIAM HINES

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Cowardly Patient

I wish to thank Preston J. Burnham for his proposed informed-consent form (Letters, 22 April). It is indeed heartwarming to learn that at least one member of the medical profession is capable of complete honesty and candor.

The matter is of personal interest to me because my doctor has insisted that I undergo the hernia operation Burnham outlined so eloquently. As explained to me, the prospect is not completely unthinkable, although terms like *incision*, *suture*, and others are obviously only synonyms for *hack*, *saw*, and *chop*. He has even been so devotious as to recommend a surgeon who has many (perhaps thousands of) successful operations to his credit, at the same time avoiding mention of the untold numbers who must surely have succumbed to the "possible complications" Burnham listed.

The latter must be aware though, that his proposed form will meet with some resistance from the more reactionary elements of the medical fraternity. When I showed it to one of my neighbors (who is said to be a competent surgeon but whom I know to be a lousy golfer), he broke up in uproarious laughter. Obviously, this sort of person will obstruct general acceptance of the proposal.

I am confident that if devout cowards like myself would sign the consent form seriously, we could not only halt medical progress but perhaps even set it back significantly.

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Information Exchange Group No. 5

Several information exchange groups (IEG) have been created by the National Institutes of Health as a means of facilitating scientific communication in certain specialized fields. In essence, each provides a selected list of participants with preprints of articles as well as with recent comments or memoranda written by members. Information disseminated in this manner may be cited in formal bibliographies as a "personal communication" but not treated as published work.

At the annual meeting of the American Association of Immunologists in Atlantic City in April, there was considerable discussion of the merits of IEG No. 5, Immunopathology. Though it was agreed that the IEG represented an important experiment in the area of rapid and effective dissemination of the results of scientific research, a number of disadvantages were noted:

1) IEG communications are sent only to a limited number of members of the scientific community. The implied selection, which might be permissible for the private dissemination of preprints, was considered improper in an operation conducted by a governmental agency.

2) While the IEG clearly accelerates communication, it does not add to it, since the preprints are read by the same scientists who will later read the published articles.

3) While the preprints are not intended to serve as a substitute for formal publications, they do so in effect, since complete manuscripts are reproduced. The contention that they are "not published work" is meaningless since they are, to an increasing degree, quoted in formal bibliographies. Attempts by a single journal, such as the Journal of Immunology, to restrict such quotation are likely to be ineffectual. There was unanimous agreement that each memorandum should be clearly marked with the warning that it does not constitute a formal publication and may not be cited.

4) Since the preprints are complete publications, there is a real danger that they will reduce the usefulness of existing journals in the field of Immunology and may ultimately supersede them.

5) No refereeing process is provided for what is, in essence, a form of publication.

6) The IEG places undue emphasis on priority. It is thus abused by many