

Letters

Resolution on Cancer

On 9 April, the Board of Directors of the American Association for Cancer Research adopted the following resolution:

The Board of Directors of the American Association for Cancer Research has examined the report of the National Panel of Consultants on the Conquest of Cancer, legislative proposal S34, the President's Health Message, and several other relevant source materials. The Board recognizes that relative advantages and disadvantages attend and coexist in any administrative mechanism for funding cancer research, that all the alternative proposals have not been formulated, and that changes from the status quo ante and in the proposals are still in progress. The Board believes that any program which is adopted must recognize the complexity of cancer, the requirement for long-term sustained national commitment, and the need for expanded resources. The Board further believes that any program which is adopted must incorporate the following characteristics:

- 1) Strong scientific leadership, with participation of the scientific community in formulation of short- and long-term plans and in evaluation of programs and priorities at all levels of decision and policy making.
- 2) Major emphasis on and support for training of young scientists and physicians in the broad range of life sciences, and funding for long-term career development in cancer research.
- 3) Substantially expanded support for individual exploratory studies of fundamental biological problems.
- 4) Continuation of the present research programs of the National Cancer Institute without impediment.
- 5) Construction of a coherent overall plan for certain areas of research which should be coordinated and focused on specific goals. Such a plan should be formulated after full consultation with, and appropriate participation by, the scientific community, to consider its value and its impact on other programs.
- 6) Adequate and continuing review of the entire program by wide segments of the scientific community.
- 7) Innovative mechanisms to translate advances in cancer research to application in human cancer with the least possible delay, with particular emphasis on prevention, control, and treatment.

Provided these essential characteristics are fulfilled, the Board believes that major acceleration in progress toward cancer control is possible with new funding.

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Relevant Research

In discussing the Nixon Administration's shift in support of scientific manpower development, from traineeships and fellowships toward research grants, Boffey (12 Mar., p. 985) quotes the President's science adviser, Edward E. David, as saying:

[It is] very appropriate that people go into the fields in which research is being done in universities—this is a way of steering them into the places, into the fields where there is important work to be done.

If this response to the current cry for relevance truly represents the Administration's basic attitude about the role of science in America, we are in serious danger. Nothing will stifle the development of new advances more effectively than the deliberate channeling of young scientific minds into the tunnels of activity that strike some people as "important" in terms of today's immediate urgencies. As the richest nation in the world, we have the obligation to stimulate training and radical thinking for the long pull and distant goals, and we must accordingly encourage free intellectual development to the fullest possible extent. Does the Administration believe that this can be accomplished within the confining framework of mission-oriented research? "Important" though such research may be, its fruits are almost wholly technological and the spin-off of fundamentally new ideas is rare and, in any case, wholly incidental. We can

see from the historical record that such a policy of research support is virtually certain to start us downward toward unimaginative, pedestrian research that will quickly leave us dangerously behind countries that pursue a more enlightened policy. . . .

I am a strong supporter of relevance in research but I believe that the pendulum has already swung too far in the direction of technologic priorities of questionable social value, and that we stand in serious danger of losing what little momentum remains in our national effort at basic or pure research—the wellsprings of all philosophical, scientific, and social advancement. I believe that we cannot afford to sacrifice the cultivation of intellectual curiosity in the interest of relevance and that we must continue to support both ends of the spectrum at all costs.

It is essential for those who recognize the hazard to move against it while there is still time. More action is necessary at the congressional level. Scientists should speak out now.

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Primate Management in Asia

The suggestions of Bermant and Chandrasekhar (Letters, 19 Feb.) are excellent, and provide several important solutions to some of the problems of primate conservation in Asia. If villagers are given an economic stake in the wild animals of their areas, they will recognize them as an asset and a source of economic gain. This could be true of other diminishing wildlife, such as black buck and grey jungle fowl as well as primates.

The field studies which Siddiqi, Pal, and I are now conducting in northern India have shown us that rhesus monkeys can exist in large groups in rural areas with relatively small home ranges (groups of 60 to 70 monkeys with home ranges of less than 6 hectares). In most cases, physical corrals for such groups are not necessary—the natural tendency of rhesus to remain in very limited areas, if food, water, cover, and reasonable protection are provided, is sufficient. Further, rhesus can be adequately supported on supplemental foods such as gram nuts; neem, tamarind, and peepul leaves; coarse fruits and vegetables; and low-cost grains, so that their damage to more important