Letters

Recombinant DNA Research: Proposed Revised Guidelines

Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare Joseph A. Califano, Jr., has approved release by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) of Proposed Revised Guidelines for recombinant DNA research funded by the NIH. The following documents were published on 28 July in the *Federal Register* for 60 days of public comment: (i) a Decision of the Director, NIH, to publish revised NIH guidelines for research involving recombinant DNA molecules; (ii) the Proposed Revised Guidelines; and (iii) an Environmental Impact Assessment of the proposed action.

Before the revised guidelines become effective, the Secretary will have all public comments reviewed by a high-level HEW committee which will be chaired by the department's General Counsel. The committee's review will also include a public hearing to be held on 15 September in the Washington, D.C., area. Within 45 days after the comment period, final guidelines will be issued with a notice in the *Federal Register*.

The events leading to the proposed revisions are described in the "Introduction and Overview" to the Decision and in the "Foreword" to the Assessment. The Decision document and the Assessment take into account all the issues raised at the public hearing of the Advisory Committee to the Director, NIH, held in December 1977 and the correspondence received on this subject before and after the public hearing. The 60-day period for public comment on these documents and the public hearing this fall provide further opportunity for public participation before release of the revised guidelines.

Comments and inquiries concerning the proposed revision of the guidelines are invited during a 60-day period beginning 28 July. Correspondence should be addressed to the Director, NIH, Building 1, Room 124, 9000 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, Maryland 20014.

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Human Rights in Argentina

José Rivarola and Julio V. Uriburu write (Letters, 21 July, p. 211) of the troubled feelings of the National Academy of Medicine of Buenos Aires over "the false and malicious reports spread abroad by the press misrepresenting the social situation in our country." These rumors, it seems, might be deterring some members of the international scientific community from attending the International Cancer Congress to be held in Buenos Aires next October.

The nature of the rumors needs to be noted: "the general climate of public insecurity, the breaking of human rights laws, the persecution of scientists, and so forth," in Argentina. Rivarola and Uriburu mention four sets of "facts" to counter these rumors. The final one states, "At present, the universities and research institutes are places of quiet and fruitful work, in contrast to the agitation, the activism, and the persecution of professors and scientists that were so frequent before March 1976."

It is entirely possible that freedom from earlier persecution and violation of human rights now makes fruitful work a reality in the medical research activities of Argentina's universities and institutes. There seems to be room to doubt, however, that this freedom applies to physicians and other applied scientists in the country. A few days before the arrival of the 21 July issue of *Science*, a communication from Amnesty International described the disappearance on 31 May 1978 in Buenos Aires of a well-known psychiatrist, Francisco Berdichevsky, a patient of his, and one of the doctor's friends who had begun looking for him. There is concern for the physical safety of the three, and for their legal status.

About a month earlier another Amnesty International communication took up the detention and disappearance of a young lawyer and psychology student—Alberto Jorge Endrell—on 19 May 1978.

The choice of declining to attend scientific meetings in countries with a record of violating the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights is, naturally, a personal one. Nevertheless, members of the international scientific community who are disinclined to attend the October cancer congress because of doubts that the U.N. declaration is being conscientiously observed in Argentina may not be fully reassured by the communication from the National Academy of Medicine in Buenos Aires.

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The Image on the Shroud

The interesting article about the shroud of Turin (News and Comment, 21 July, p. 235) does not mention one possible origin of the image, namely, transfer from a preexisting painting rather than from an actual body. It seems to have been established that the shroud itself is not a painting from which most of the pigment has been removed, but could it not be a piece of linen that had long lain in contact with a flat painting on another surface? The appearance does not suggest transfer from a complex object in three dimensions, for the details do not properly relate to points of contact and reversals of curvature. Moreover, a close wrap around would show ears and hair in lateral view, not frontal. However, a piece of linen wrapped around a flat painting to protect it during storage or emergency would take up an impression from loose pigment particles, from water-soluble dyes carried in dampness by capillarity, and from slightly volatile components of the resins and other organic materials commonly used by painters as vehicles and binders. Even if these substances were adsorbed in amounts too minute to be immediately visible, they would locally modify the darkening of the fabric with age. Such transfer effects can be seen in many old books that contain color illustrations.

A scientist using sophisticated modern instruments in the study of ancient objects must maintain close, continuing interaction with the broader expertise of other scholars. (This is why I feel uneasy about the growing use of the term "archaeometry" to describe this type of study, for it should be so much more than measurement).

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Human Cloning: An Apathetic View

Doomsday predictions of the outcomes of scientific research tend to overlook the social variables that intervene