LETTERS

Wistar Press: Comment on Closing

The following editorial will appear in the journals listed below. In each journal, the managing editor will sign first.

We, the Managing Editors of the Wistar Journals, on the occasion of closing of The Wistar Press, wish to express our appreciation to the many members of its staff. Each of us and uncounted authors have benefitted from their commitment on multiple levels to the communication of scientific information and to the highest quality of reproduction. We are sad to see the end of the era of service to the scientific community by The Wistar Press. Its staff can take satisfaction from the knowledge that they have made a lasting contribution to many fields of biology. We thank them sincerely and wish them well.

ROBERT L. BRENT
Teratology

SAM L. CLARK, JR.
The American Journal of Anatomy

MAXWELL W. COWAN
The Journal of Comparative Neurology

VITTORIO DEFENDI
Journal of Cellular Physiology

CARL GANS
Journal of Morphology

FRANCIS E. JOHNSTON
American Journal of Physical Anthropology

AARON J. LADMAN
The Anatomical Record

CLEMENT L. MARKERT
EDGAR J. BOELL
The Journal of Experimental Zoology

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Food Additives

Two weeks after Philip H. Abelson's trenchant editorial, "Cancer—opportunism and opportunity" appeared in *Science* (5 Oct., p. 11), Michael Jacobson, director of the Washington-based Center for Science in The Public Interest, had this to say about our food supply: "I'd estimate that a maximum of 10,000 to 20,000 deaths per year could be attributed to artificial food additives" (*1*).

If 10,000 to 20,000 people die each year of cancer-causing food additives, I'd call that an epidemic. Abelson maintains that if food is a health problem it is related to naturally occurring substances and/or the cooking process.

It is just this type of contradictory information that leads to people's fearing the worst and, more damaging, to their being unable to evaluate risks.

Few are going to question where or how Jacobson obtained his figure of 10,000 to 20,000 deaths per year. It will be accepted as fact—because it's in

print. I've tried to corroborate his figures but can't. Not because no one will give me the data, but because no one appears to have them. Yet they are, thanks to Jacobson, now part of the public record—to be quoted and requoted.

I suspect it will take more than one or even a series of editorials in *Science* to change the public image of our food supply—a potpourri of carcinogens.

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References

1. Philadelphia *Bulletin*, 21 October 1979, p. 10.

Biotechnology and Profit

There is one aspect which I thought was omitted from the otherwise complete factual account by Nicholas Wade (News and Comment, 9 Nov., p. 663) of the founding, funding, and management of research of the smaller new biotechnological companies. Much of what these companies are doing is based on fundamental research, mostly the use of restriction enzymes in recombinant DNA work, research funded by public moneys, some of it I am sure in direct grants to some of the biologists who are now so involved with these companies. This is how it has been with pharmaceutical companies; there is no bar against this, but it seems to me that there is an ethical principle being violated. That principle has to do with the reason why public money is being spent on biological research; namely, that the fruits of this research will be available to the public who has supported it. Of course it will be available, but in the process, there will be profits, great and small, for the companies involved and, I gather, for some of the individual scientists involved. Of course the public will eventually benefit if, for example, a large supply of insulin is available; but at what price?

Now that these companies are set up and are going concerns, may I suggest to those scientists who either manage the companies, sit on their boards, or advise them, that they see to it that the profit margins to the investors are small; and that if large profits accrue, that these be placed in research funds to be plowed back into basic research, preferably to support young scientists who have not had the opportunity to dip into the public trough for private gain.