Letters

Reform of Peer Review

Lest the published response (Letters, 19 June, p. 1335) to Rustum Roy's editorial (27 Mar., p. 1377) on peer review leave the impression that the readership is uniformly negative on his proposed "alternative funding mechanism," I wish to offer a minority report.

As a critic of peer review, especially as practiced at the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health (*1*), and in agreement with at least three social science studies (*2*), I applaud Roy's recommendations as provocative and potentially constructive reforms. They take cognizance of a needed realignment of scientists' sacrosanct research values, such as autonomy and rewards for performance, with broader cultural values of accountability, egalitarianism, national excellence, and improved quality of life. Can this multitude of often competing values be accommodated by a single "proposal-review system" (as Roy calls it)? I think not.

The research community must be weaned from the view that the demands of patrons and policy-makers (from the Office of Management and Budget to local university administrators) are an incursion into its boundless creativity. Although Roy's formula for efficient, merit-based research allocations is no panacea, the system he outlines and details elsewhere (*3*) *is* a step toward reform.

Another such step was recently taken by George Kurzon. In a suit originally brought against the Department of Health and Human Services, Kurzon sought disclosure, under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), of "the names of scientists who have made grant applications to the National Cancer Institute (NCI) and whose applications have been turned down" (*4*). He took this action contending that the peer review system does not work well where the scientist is unconventional in his or her thinking. The case in point: Albert Szent-Györgyi (*5*). The government argued that the names of scientists denied grants are immune from the provisions of the FOIA. On 21 August 1980, the District Court of Massachusetts upheld the government's position.

In support of his appeal, Kurzon requested that I submit an affadavit to augment one by Rustum Roy submitted in behalf of the original suit. On 22 May 1981, the First Circuit Court of Appeals sustained Kurzon's appeal, reversing the district court's decision. The names and addresses of scientists declined in the last 2 years for NCI funding will soon be released. This will allow research on the effects of peer review—wasteful and facilitative alike—by tapping the experiences of those whose proposals were either declined NCI support or approved with too low a study section priority rating to receive support.

In sum, the lawsuits of the Kurzons and the proposals of the Roys may help allay public skepticism about the conduct and eventual benefits of scientific research. They may also make some scientists squirm by subjecting one of their private rituals to public scrutiny. But it is far better, in my view, to seek reform of a system than to disregard or bemoan its existence.

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References and Notes

1. I. I. Mitroff and D. E. Chubin, *Soc. Stud. Sci.* **9**, 199 (1979); D. E. Chubin, *Contemp. Soc.* **9**, 204 (1980). For a cross-cultural perspective and a first-person case history of peer review in Australia, see C. Manwell, *Search* **10**, 81 (1979).
2. G. Carter, *Peer Review, Citations and Biomedical Research Policy: NIH Grants to Medical School Faculty* (Report 1583-HEW, Rand Corp., Santa Monica, Calif., 1974); D. R. Hensler, *Perceptions of the National Science Foundation Peer Review Process: A Report on a Survey of NSF Reviewers and Applicants* (prepared for the Committee on Peer Review, National Science Board, and the Committee on Science and Technology, U.S. House of Representatives, by the National Science Foundation, Washington, D.C., 1976); S. Cole, L. Rubin, J. R. Cole, *Peer Review in the National Science Foundation: Phase One of a Study* (National Academy of Sciences, Washington, D.C., 1978).
3. R. Roy, "Statement to the subcommittee on science, research, and technology" (U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C., 29 July 1975).
4. G. M. Kurzon, "Brief of the Appelles" (submitted to U. S. Court of Appeals, 1st Circuit; heard on 12 February 1981).
5. See T. M. Vogt, *Science* **203**, 1293 (1979).

Cousins' Recovery

Constance Holden's article (News and Comment, 20 Nov., p. 892) about Florence A. Ruderman's comments on *Anatomy of an Illness* refers to my "self-cure." I was not involved in any "self-cure." The emphasis in my book was on the importance of the patient-physician relationship. I gave my physician principal credit for my recovery. The initiatives I took were first discussed with him; nothing was done without his support. It would be unfortunate and indeed harmful if seriously ill persons were encouraged to ignore competent medical attention in favor of supposed self-cures. At the same time, I believe patients must participate directly in efforts at recovery.

I have no comment to make on Ruderman's article in *Commentary*—or her various talks based on that article—other than to say she has not asked to see any of the original medical records. Her credentials for commenting on my medical condition are not clear.

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Hayflick–NIH Settlement

In March 1976, the National Institutes of Health released reports in which several serious allegations were made against Dr. Leonard Hayflick. Immediately thereafter Dr. Hayflick brought suit against the U.S. government. Now, after nearly 6 years of litigation, the parties have reached an out-of-court settlement that we believe to be just and counter to the NIH's (the defendant's) claims.

In view of the wide publicity given to NIH's original allegations we believe that publication of the settlement terms will set the record straight and redress some of the injustices suffered by Professor Hayflick; we also believe this exoneration of a fellow scientist might prevent the occurrence in the future of similar violations of individual rights.

Many of the undersigned favored Hayflick's continued pursuit of his charges against the government through a trial and the inevitable appeals and delays because the suffering by the Hayflicks professionally and financially seemed to warrant an award of damages. However, the case has been settled out of court and litigation ended because the alternative could well have taken additional years out of a limited lifetime and because the costs of litigation against a defendant with unlimited resources would have posed insuperable burdens on Hayflick and indefinitely delayed the resolution of key principles of justice.

Therefore, in light of these practical considerations, an out-of-court agree-