

the rest are recruited from outside government or from government technical agencies.

The Polish government action came at a time of increased tension over protest activities by Solidarity and of increased reports in the Polish press of government accusations that Western countries were interfering in Poland's internal affairs.

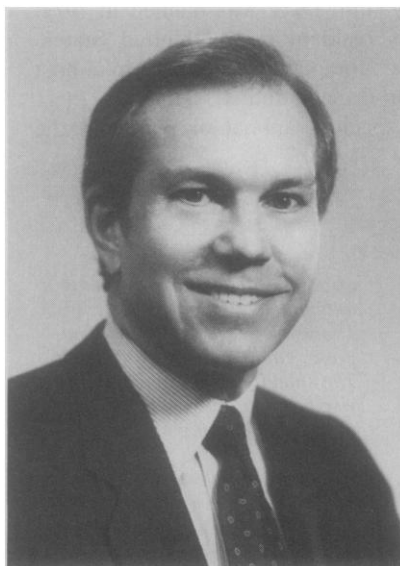
—John Walsh

Wyngaarden Meets the Press

James B. Wyngaarden, who was sworn in at the end of April as the 12th director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), held his first official meeting with the press on 11 May. He took the occasion to reaffirm the view that NIH's primary mission is basic research (as opposed, for instance, to regulation) and emphasized his commitment to a program of stabilization in the number of new investigator-initiated research grants. His predecessor, Donald S. Fredrickson, had elicited a promise of 5000 new grants a year, but that was before the Reagan Administration's new budget limitations were in place. Under the proposed budget for next year, there will be only 4100 new starts. Says Wyngaarden, "The important thing is the stabilization concept which is more important than the numbers themselves. The message NIH is sending to medical students and postdocs is that there will be a continued commitment to new research. Already that message is having a small but perceptible effect. I could see it as chairman at Duke." He also reiterated his belief in the importance of training grants for young researchers, although there, too, budgetary constraints will keep the numbers to 8900, substantially below the optimal figure of 10,750 that was set by the National Academy of Sciences biomedical manpower committee of which Wyngaarden is a member.

In response to a question about moves that are afoot to create new institutes (NIH currently has 11), Wyngaarden voiced opposition, especially since the political purpose of new disease-oriented institutes is to enhance

visibility and funding. "In a period of constrained resources, the creation of new institutes is illogical," he declared. Questions about superstar status of the National Cancer Institute, which legally has a direct channel to the White House, elicited a laissez-faire reaction. "As a practical matter, it



James B. Wyngaarden

Emphasizes concept of grant stabilization and support of training

doesn't matter," Wyngaarden said. "I have more pressing concerns."

Although Wyngaarden's traditionalist views are of greatest interest to NIH's research constituency, his position on abortion was what brought headlines in the daily papers. In answer to a reporter's question, he noted that NIH does not do research on methods of abortion but does do basic research in human genetics on which prenatal diagnosis is based. "I believe in freedom of choice," he said, "and that the NIH should provide the maximum scientific basis on which intelligent choices can be made." He also answered a question about in vitro fertilization, saying that he thinks it a legitimate area of research which may alleviate infertility in some couples.

Within hours, he got a call from the office of Health and Human Services Secretary Richard S. Schweiker who, like many other HHS officials has taken an antiabortion stance as a matter of policy. Schweiker subsequently issued a statement saying, "Dr. Wyngaarden has told me that he was responding to a reporter's question about his personal belief, which differs

from mine, and he has assured me he intends to fully support the President's position on this matter as well as all other administration positions."

Although HHS officials were hardly pleased by the first news accounts of the press conference, they apparently are content to let it lie as the minor incident it is.—Barbara J. Culliton

More on Yellow Rain

On 13 May the State Department released the third in a series of reports this year on toxic chemical attacks in Southeast Asia. (The arsenals were presumably supplied by the Soviet Union, according to a paper released in March by Secretary of State Alexander Haig.) In an effort to win over those skeptical of earlier reports, says Frederick Celec of the Politico-Military Affairs branch of State, the authors of the recent press release tried to present the data without offering much of an interpretation.

According to the State Department, U.S. officials obtained blood and urine samples from several people in Tuol Chrey, Kampuchea, shortly after the village was hit with a chemical-laden Vietnamese artillery shell in February 1982.

Blood samples from two of the victims, taken within 24 hours of the attack, were found to contain 18 and 11 parts per billion of the trichothecene toxin T2. The poison is derived from a fungus most commonly found on grain. An American physician not connected with the U.S. government, Amos Townsend, also took blood samples 18 days after the attack. Blood from two of the six victims in Townsend's sampling contained 7 and 3 parts per billion of the toxin T2. Samples were also collected from four controls, people of similar age and background who had not been exposed to the chemical attack. These samples proved to be free of the toxin.

The blood analysis, done on a coded, blind basis by Chester Mirocha of the University of Minnesota, provides "conclusive evidence that these trichothecene mycotoxins are components of the chemical agents known in Laos and Kampuchea as 'Yellow Rain'", the State Department concludes.—Elliot Marshall