Letters

Electronic Publishing

Having read both Edward P. Ney's and George L. Trigg's views (Letters, 4 Nov., p. 456; 2 Dec., p. 966) on the proliferation of journals in the sciences, I note that neither mentions the alternatives available for the storage and retrieval of journal literature. I agree with both of them that the volume of scientific journal publishing imposes a great strain on libraries and other repositories; however, several steps have already been taken to develop more efficient ways of storing and disseminating journal literature.

For example, Ney proposes the creation of a "journal library" that would relieve university libraries of the need to collect large numbers of journals. In fact, the Center for Research Libraries in Chicago and the British Library Lending Division in Yorkshire, England, were both developed a decade ago to address the problem of the increased volume of publishing and declining budgets. Through these two organizations, libraries and research centers may request copies of articles available in publications not held by the requester. Turnaround time is generally good, and only a small transaction charge is involved. Both services are supported by user institutions through membership fees and transaction charges. Most important, because both institutions are supporting a wide range of interests, they are able to support collection policies that include a broad range of subjects.

Trigg writes that the use of a document delivery service to supplant the traditional "hands-on" literature search will lead to the demise of many journals and thus should not be encouraged. In fact, several publishers have experimented with on-line, full-text publishing as an alternative to hard copy publications. One example is the *Academic American Encyclopedia* (*1*). These experiments indicate that electronic publishing will be a prime medium for the communication of scientific knowledge.

In short, the glut of journal literature is not an insurmountable problem. However, an alliance between scientists and information professionals must be formed today if we are to cope with the increased publishing output of the future.

ROBERT F. CLARKE
Canadian Hydrographic Service, Ottawa, Canada K1A 0E6

References

1. *Academic America Encyclopedia* (Grolier, New York, updated every 6 months; available through CompuServ, Dow Jones News/Retrieval, and BRS).

Recombinant DNA Committee

As a former member of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Recombinant DNA Advisory Committee (RAC) (January 1979 to June 1982), I wish to correct one statement in Barbara J. Culliton's otherwise fine summary (News and Comment, 6 Jan., p. 35) of the current debate about the RAC's role in reviewing proprietary proposals from private industry. In mentioning RAC's meeting last September, when two requests for recombinant DNA experiments from industry were being considered, Culliton states that "[i]t was the first time the RAC has shut its doors to the public." The record shows otherwise. While I was a RAC member, the committee, over a period of almost 2 years, held regular closed sessions whenever proposals from industry were being discussed. Except for RAC members and certain NIH staff, no one from the public, the press, or other industries was present at these sessions.

At the time when these closed sessions were being held, I had strong personal reservations, shared by other members of RAC, about their appropriateness. It was my feeling that, because I was a public representative on the committee and a nongovernmental adviser to NIH, it was highly questionable for me to sit in closed sessions, where proprietary information was being disclosed, when I was not able to discuss them publicly. I therefore withdrew myself from all closed sessions, making clear to the then director of NIH, Donald S. Fredrickson, my reasons for doing so. The present reassessment of RAC's role on this very issue raises a fundamental question of public policy: are NIH advisory committees, such as RAC, acting in a "quasiregulatory" manner when they are required to respond to proprietary proposals from industry? Isn't this role the function of federal regulatory bodies, whose responsibilities have been clearly defined by statute and who are required by law to provide adequate public notice and comment on any proposals from the regulated industry?

Unfortunately, at present, this matter remains unresolved. By default, we have referred all questions relating to research and development of recombinant DNA technology to NIH and its advisory committee, RAC, both of which have no regulatory authority over private industry. I certainly support the present efforts of NIH to review the role of RAC in this regard. However, unless we take further measures at the legislative level to address this question, the present confusing and, I believe, unwise policies will continue to prevail.

A. KARIM AHMED
Natural Resources Defense Council, 122 East 42 Street, New York 10168

Parapsychology Report

Constance Holden, in her 2 December reference (News and Comment, p. 997) to my report "Research into 'psi' phenomena: current status and trends of congressional concern," states that it "concludes with a glowing catalog of all the fields of human endeavor that could be enhanced by the harnessing of psi abilities. It makes no mention of the appalling social disruption such powers could also bring."

I take exception to the last sentence. First, the "glowing catalog" included in it the potential for "mischief and disinformation" (see p. CRS-25, paragraph 2, last line). Second, psi in various forms has been around for a long time and has already been applied for practical (and not-so-practical) purposes in a number of areas with no "appalling social disruption."

CHRISTOPHER H. DODGE
Science Policy Research Division, Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. 20540