Generic Valium Approved by FDA

Three companies recently got approval from the Food and Drug Administration to market generic versions of Valium, the fourth best-selling drug in the United States. The companies won FDA approval under a streamlined review process that was established last year for generic drugs.

Diazepam, which is the active ingredient in Valium, will cost substantially less because of price competition among several companies. Currently 100 5-milligram tablets of Valium cost about $22, according to the American Association of Retired Persons. Zenith Laboratories, Inc., one of the companies that received approval, says it will cut the price by 30 to 50 percent. The other two companies are Mylan Pharmaceuticals Inc. and Parke-Davis. Additional companies have also applied to FDA to market diazepam.

Hoffmann–La Roche, the manufacturer of Valium, in February tried to block FDA approval of generic diazepams, asserting that they were not bioequivalent to Valium. FDA, however, rejected the company's argument (*Science*, 26 July, p. 369; 26 April, p. 472).—**MARJORIE SUN**

Navy Personnel Told to Attend Fewer Conferences

An effort by Secretary of the Navy John F. Lehman, Jr., to cut down attendance by Navy personnel at conferences and symposia is causing a bit of a stir among technical societies. The president of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), in particular, has written to Lehman warning that the new policy "could be harmful to the technical competence of personnel who are important to the Department's [of the Navy] mission."

The concern stems from a directive Lehman sent to all Navy units in June whose purpose was "To reduce attendance at and participation in non-government sponsored symposia, conferences or meetings by any other name." To achieve this goal, Lehman ordered a 25 percent reduction in funds spent on conference attendance for the rest of fiscal year 1985, which ends on 30 September, and a 50 percent cut for fiscal year 1986. The actual reduction is likely to be greater than this, however, because the cuts must be based on expenditures between June and September l984, a period when relatively few conferences were held.

One Navy official told the *New York Times* that the directive was sent out after Lehman began noticing numerous brochures for conferences and symposia. The IEEE, which has many members in the Department of Defense, has asked Lehman to make an exemption for scientists and engineers. "It is essential that those scientists and engineers who work for the Navy, both military and civilian, keep abreast of the most recent developments in their fields of competence," wrote IEEE president Charles Eldon.—**COLIN NORMAN**

Paying for Research Instrumentation

The problem of financing research equipment continues to get high-level attention in Washington. In early September the House Task Force on Science Policy held a hearing on a study conducted by a university-industry group that was commissioned in 1982 by the federal Interagency Working Group on University Research Instrumentation.

The report, "Financing and Managing University Research Equipment," notes that instrumentation is getting ever more expensive while its useful life is getting ever shorter—having shrunk to 5 years or less. But for more than 15 years, "the funds available from all sources have failed consistently to reflect the rising costs and declining useful lifetimes of academic research equipment." Benchtop equipment priced at $50,000 or more is common. According to a National Science Foundation survey, 72 percent of department chairmen say critical experiments are impeded by equipment shortages, 20 percent of the instruments are obsolete, and only 52 percent of those in use are in top working condition.

The situation has not been ignored: the NSF, the Defense Department, and the Department of Energy are making stepped-up investments in instrumentation. Nonetheless, there has been a major drop in the proportion of research project support that is being allocated for equipment—at the National Institutes of Health, for example, the proportion fell from 11.7 percent in 1966 to 3.1 percent this year.

The study, conducted by the Association of American Universities, the Council on Governmental Relations, and the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, developed 26 recommendations after examining funding regulations and practices.

With regard to federal policies, the report says "inconsistent interpretation" of regulations "leads to unnecessarily conservative management practices at universities." For example, it says interest on borrowed funds should always be an allowable cost, and title to new equipment should be vested to universities on acquisition. It recommends that federal agencies more adequately recognize the full costs of equipment, including maintenance and space renovation. It also advises more flexibility, allowing for the sharing of costs across award and agency lines.

As for the states, the report recommends that they grant institutions more flexibility in handling funds—for example, universities need to be allowed to carry over appropriations from 1 year to the next. States could revise their controls on procurement in recognition of the typically specialized nature of scientific equipment. They could also loosen much of their controls on debt financing of equipment in recognition of the increasingly short useful lifetime of many instruments.

The universities, for their part, are advised to explore greater use of tax-exempt debt financing (borrowing) for new equipment. The report says a more centralized approach to planning would facilitate this activity. They could also seek approval from funding agencies to stagger the costs of expensive equipment that is charged directly to research project awards. Equipment sharing within universities is encouraged, as are new mechanisms to encourage universities to