Letters

Misuse of the Freedom of Information Act

Three times within the last several years individuals, through the Freedom of Information Act, have obtained the narrative of my grant proposals funded by the National Institutes of Health. One request was from a senior investigator at a major university, one from an industrial scientist at a large commercial firm, and one from a junior staff member of a national laboratory. The requesters did not send their requests to me directly nor did they inform me of their interest in my work. Were it not for the policy of NIH to inform the grantee when such requests are received, I would not have known that my grant narratives had been requested.

I strongly support the Freedom of Information Act. I can also appreciate the rationale that grants, once funded, become part of the public domain and should be available for scrutiny by interested parties concerned with the appropriate spending of federal moneys. In the three instances of my personal experience, I strongly doubt that this is the case. Rather, it seems more likely that individuals have sought this information for their own purpose and not to ensure that governmental processes are carried out under public observation. Although I am usually eager to share my thoughts and ideas, I do not believe that grant proposals are an appropriate vehicle for scientific dialogue.

The misuse of the Freedom of Information Act, as I believe these instances are, should be a matter of concern for the scientific community. Not only does this increasing misuse contribute to a degradation of the collegiality ostensibly underpinning our scientific communication, it also represents a practice that could perturb the integrity of the peer-review process for research proposal funding. I suggest that a policy might be adopted whereby requests for grant narratives would be supplied by NIH only if the requester has not been successful in obtaining these documents directly from the originator of the grant proposal. This would ensure that the requester would be required to justify to the author the need for the information. If agreement cannot be reached between author and requester, then it seems appropriate to obtain the grant from NIH.

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Rüdenberg's Patents

The statement in Arthur L. Robinson's excellent account of the Nobel awards for the electron microscope (Research News, 14 Nov., p. 821), that the German patent office did not grant a patent to Reinhold Rüdenberg, is incorrect. Eight German patents that bore Rüdenberg's name were issued after World War II to the German company Siemens-Schuckertwerke.

Rüdenberg's U.S. patent was found to be adequate in litigation, where he successfully won ownership of two U.S. patents from the Alien Property Custodian after wartime confiscation from Siemens (*1*). I can find no record of any Rüdenberg patent infringement suit against RCA (*2*), as mentioned in the article.

The award of the Nobel Prize a half-century later and many years after all of the Rüdenberg electron microscope patents (*3*) had expired does not support Robinson's speculation that the U.S. patent office made a mistake in its grants to Rüdenberg. It appears that Siemens and Rüdenberg complied with the patent laws of six countries. At the same time there is no doubt that Ruska deserves the Nobel honor for his fundamental work in electron optics and for his independent invention, design, and building of the first electron microscope.

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REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Rüdenberg v. Clark, 72 Fed. Suppl. 381 (Mass. Dist. Ct., 1947).
2. See Rüdenberg v. Clark, 81 Fed. Suppl. 42, 43–46 (Rüdenberg license proffer to RCA) (Mass. Dist. Ct., 1948).
3. The Rüdenberg patents are listed in M. M. Freundlich's article [*Science* **142**, 185 (1963)].

Quality of Biomedical Literature

In view of the current controversy as to whether scientific fraud is increasing, let me suggest that the insidious rise in publication costs and subtle changes of editorial policy and attitude are having serious effects on the quality of the biomedical literature.

As an occasional reviewer for several journals, I frequently find myself requesting additional data and controls. I am aware that my suggestions are often forwarded to the authors accompanied by a recommendation from the editor, understandably concerned over publication costs to the journal, for an abbreviation of the text. The author is thus faced with the impossible chore of supplying more data in less space. In general, he opts for cutting the text and assuring the editor that the requested controls have been performed to an extent that would satisfy even the most critical. But the data are not shown. The reviewer is then presented with the unenviable task of accepting the revised manuscript or imputing the integrity of the author.

As a separate issue, it would appear that some of our leading journals have established as policy to accept frankly incomplete manuscripts if they are judged scientifically exciting. These same journals often reject well-documented work under the pretext that it lacks sufficient general interest, particularly when a preliminary report on a similar topic has appeared elsewhere.

Add a growing public perception that truth encompasses all that is not explicitly false, and the message to young investigators is clear. Give us your half-baked ideas and spare us the boring details. At least 10 percent of what I read today in our leading journals, while certainly *not* fraudulent, is, however, incomplete, inadequate, and even incompetent.

In this milieu, if scientific fraud is not increasing, it will be. The victims will be all of us.

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Quantitative Risk Aspects of the "Woburn Case"

I was amused to read Daniel E. Koshland, Jr.'s editorial calling for reason in the area of toxic substances and the environment (24 Oct., p. 409), not only because of its usual tongue-in-cheek humor, but also because it was followed a few pages later by a discussion of an excellent example of irrationality in an environmental health issue, namely the "Woburn case."

In his well-balanced article, Eliot Marshall (News & Comment, p. 418) describes the background, outcome, and scientific issues of this case. Not discussed, however, are the quantitative risk aspects, which show (i) that it is highly unlikely that the reported levels of pollution in public wells "G" and "H" could have caused the elevated leukemia rate in Woburn, Massachusetts, and (ii) that drinking the well water presented no more hazard than consuming ordinary chlorinated U.S. tap water.

The calculations that allow one to reach these two conclusions are based on the measured levels of trichloroethylene, perchloroethylene, and chloroform in well G