

France, Britain Boost AIDS Funds

Paris

Both the British and French governments announced last week that they are substantially increasing their support for research into the prevention and treatment of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), an indication that the disease has become a top political priority in the two countries.

In the United Kingdom, the Medical Research Council (MRC) has been awarded an extra \$22.3 million over the next 3 years to pursue the development of an AIDS vaccine and potential antiviral therapies. In a sharp break with conventional practice, individual research topics will be decided by one of two central committees, and scientists will be invited to accept the earmarked funds. Traditionally, the MRC supports scientists outside its own research units primarily on the basis of unsolicited applications.

In France, an extra 60 research posts have been allocated to the National Institute for Health and Medical Research (INSERM), together with \$3 million for new laboratory equipment. In addition, the Pasteur Institute in Paris is being given funds for an immediate 300-square-meter extension to the laboratory of Luc Montagnier—as well as for the construction of a new laboratory block scheduled for opening sometime in early 1990.

The British money has been granted in response to proposals submitted to the government by the secretary of the MRC, Sir James Gowans. The research council is already supporting more than 20 separate research projects on AIDS, but so far at a relatively modest level. Its efforts will be more than doubled over the coming year, with the help of an extra \$3.8 million from the government. In the next 2 years, the extra research funds—which are to be added to the annual science budget—will amount to \$7.7 million and \$10.8 million, respectively.

The money will be used to support research in both public and private laboratories. It will be allocated by two scientific committees, both with full-time directors, one of which will concentrate on the development of vaccines, and the other on potential therapeutic drugs.

Health and Social Services Secretary Norman Fowler said in an interview with the British Broadcasting Corporation last week that the strategy of directing research programs from the center had been based in part on the contract research procedures

followed by the U.S. National Institutes of Health.

MRC secretary Gowans admitted at a press conference in London that the additional research funding is small relative to that being spent in the United States. But he pointed out that a relatively higher proportion is being specifically allocated to vaccine research, and the money will allow British scientists to play a full and active part in the worldwide fight against the disease.

The extra research funding in France was announced by the Minister of Health, Michèle Barzach, as part of a package of anti-AIDS measures that also included the decision to allow pharmacies to sell syringes to the public for the first time since 1972 and a \$2-million publicity campaign on French television to be launched in the summer.

Besides the research facilities to be constructed at the Pasteur Institute—the promise of which is reported in Paris to have helped persuade Montagnier to stay at the institute rather than set up his own, separate center for the research and treatment of AIDS—a new institute for immunological research into the effects of the AIDS virus will be established by INSERM. According to Barzach, the increased research funding “will allow France to extend and reinforce without any reservations its collaboration with the United States.” ■

DAVID DICKSON

AIDS Commission Bills Proliferate

Three new bills have been introduced in Congress, with at least a fourth in preparation, to establish a national coordinating body to combat AIDS. All three existing proposals—two from the Senate and one from the House—indicate that the duties of the proposed AIDS commission or panel will be to evaluate problems and progress in fighting the AIDS epidemic and to advise Congress and the President. The fourth bill, still being drafted, will also create additional funds for AIDS research, education, and public health and will try to increase the potential for the development of an AIDS vaccine.

In January, Senator Ted Stevens (R-AK) and Representative Jerry Lewis (R-CA) introduced identical bills to create a national presidential commission on AIDS along the lines of that recommended by the Institute of Medicine in its report (“Confronting AIDS”) last fall. The commission would produce a report for Congress and the President within 18 months of its inception and

then be disbanded 3 months later. It would consist of six cabinet members and fifteen others—health officials, academic researchers, representatives of private organizations dealing with AIDS, and private citizens—to be appointed by the President.

In contrast, a bill introduced on 26 February by Senator Pete Wilson (R-CA) calls for a congressional advisory panel on AIDS to be funded at \$3 million a year for 5 years by grant money from the Department of Health and Human Services. The Institute of Medicine would apply for the HHS grant and its AIDS panel would consist of not more than ten members, none of whom are Institute officers or members. The panel would submit reports on its operations to both the President and appropriate congressional committees.

Still being drafted is a separate bill from Senator Edward Kennedy (D-MA) that will include additional money for AIDS research outside the existing NIH budget, as well as more funds for education and public health. The Kennedy bill will also try to create an environment that will foster the development of a vaccine to prevent AIDS.

The House Subcommittee on Health and the Environment, chaired by Henry Waxman (D-CA), will consider the Lewis bill, Senator John Glenn’s (D-OH) Committee on Governmental Affairs will consider the Stevens bill, and the Committee on Labor and Human Resources, which Kennedy chairs will consider the Wilson and Kennedy legislation.

None of the existing bills authorizes a proposed AIDS panel to take action, but all reflect congressional response to the epidemic. ■ DEBORAH M. BARNES

Briefing:

New Newsletter

Allen L. Hammond, editor of *Science* 86, the popular science magazine published by AAAS until a crunch in advertising revenue forced its sale to Time Inc., plans to launch a monthly newsletter, *Science Impact Letter*. Hammond says the newsletter will examine the intellectual, social, and human import of current developments in science and technology. Hammond will act as editor and publisher and be involved in the writing. Financial backer of the newsletter is Ralph Landau, a successful pioneer in high-technology sectors of the chemical industry who is now vice president of the National Academy of Engineering. Publication is scheduled to begin in May with charter subscriptions for 12 issues set at \$17.97. ■ J.W.