

Perpich to Head New Hughes Program

The Howard Hughes Medical Institute is making plans for a new \$500-million grants and fellowships program that will include support of science education

THE Howard Hughes Medical Institute,* with more than \$5 billion in assets, is already one of the most powerful forces in biomedical research. At 21 major medical centers across the country, some 100 hand-picked HHMI scientists are working at the forefront of research in the five disciplines the institute has chosen to support: molecular genetics, immunology, cell biology, neuroscience, and structural biology. For this—the heart and soul of the Hughes enterprise—the budget is around \$200 million a year.

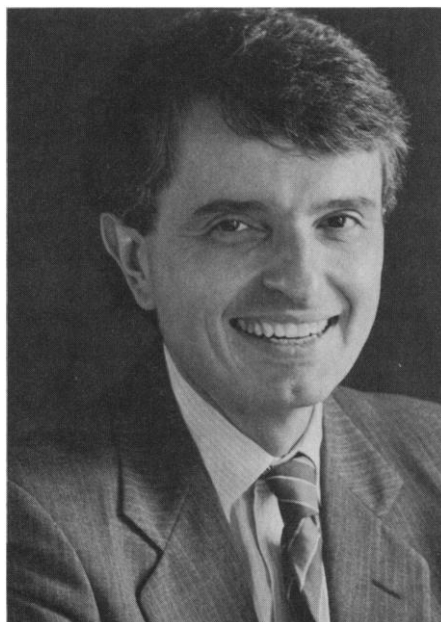
But now HHMI is about to expand its horizons and its influence. As part of the recent settlement of a decade-old tax dispute with the Internal Revenue Service, the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) is launching a completely new grants and fellowships program that will allow it to range beyond its traditional confines in elite medical schools (*Science*, 13 March, p. 1318). HHMI has agreed to spend \$500 million in the next 10 years on this new program—that is, \$500 million on top of the \$200 million a year to which it is already committed. HHMI president Donald S. Fredrickson has recruited Joseph G. Perpich as director of the new program to which hundreds of would-be beneficiaries are already looking for support.

In a recent interview with *Science*, Perpich talked about the HHMI grants program, emphasizing that as yet there are no firm guidelines for allocating the funds—just what one Hughes trustee calls “a shopping list as long as everybody’s aspirations.” There is no procedure for handling requests, no hard-and-fast plan for reviewing applications, no decision even about what areas will be considered for support. However, it is likely that within the next few months the trustees will agree on three or four areas and then stick with them, just as HHMI limits itself with regard to the areas of basic biomedical research that it finances. A subcommittee of the Hughes board of trustees,

headed by University of Chicago president Hanna H. Gray, met this week to begin formulating a coherent plan.

Though specifics may be lacking, certain general ideas about how the program will operate can be stated, says Perpich, who sees similarities between the structure of Hughes and the National Institutes of Health with its intramural and extramural programs. “The Hughes research institutes at major medical centers are our intramural program,” Perpich observes. “The new program is our extramural arm.” At present, Hughes researchers work at HHMI institutes that have been established at universities including Harvard, Yale, Rockefeller, and Stanford. At each, what Fredrickson calls a “critical mass” of research talent has been assembled under the Hughes name. Perpich expects that, as part of the new grants and fellowships program, an individual researcher may be able to get funding, as long as he or she is working in one of the five HHMI sciences.

The principal focus of the new program,



Joseph G. Perpich will head new Howard Hughes grants program.

however, is likely to be in science education and the public understanding of science, particularly in college and high school. A special hope is that ways will be found to bring present Hughes scholars into the effort. “They are the cream of the crop scientifically,” Perpich notes, imagining the possibility of college teachers or students spending time in a Hughes lab. One can project a kind of junior-year-abroad approach, with students going to a Hughes institute instead of Florence. Curriculum enhancement is another item on the list of potential areas for Hughes to enter.

Perpich comes to his new position at Hughes with a broad background in medicine, law, ethics, and business. A 1966 graduate of the University of Minnesota Medical School, Perpich, 45, took residency positions in psychiatry at the Massachusetts General Hospital and the National Institute of Mental Health. In 1974, he got a law degree from Georgetown University. He worked on Capitol Hill as a congressional fellow, and was a law clerk to Chief Judge David Bazelon of the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia. During Fredrickson’s tenure as president of the Institute of Medicine, Perpich developed a program in ethics for the IOM, and then followed Fredrickson to the National Institutes of Health where he worked on the development of recombinant DNA guidelines. From there, Perpich branched out into the biotechnology industry. His most recent position was with Meloy Laboratories in Springfield, Virginia, where he was vice president for planning and program development.

Fredrickson says he is “delighted” to have Perpich back in the fold.

The Hughes Institute has shown considerable discipline in limiting its research support to a few areas that its medical advisors believe to be central to the future of medicine. There are reasons to think that some of that same discipline will show itself in the trustees’ ultimate decisions about just how they want to spend their newly committed \$500 million. Already, Hughes offices have been deluged with requests for support, what one trustee calls a lot of “appealing appeals,” and nearly everyone associated with HHMI has heard from friends and colleagues who hope some of the \$500 million will go their way. The pressures are great, to no one’s surprise. But there is no sense that Hughes is about to be pushed into anything. Perpich foresees a gradual evolution of the new program and says it would be a mistake to rush to decision. Would-be beneficiaries may be in for a lesson in patience. ■

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