

Reuters to Defy Journal Embargo

Reuters news agency, which has been accused by the *New England Journal of Medicine* of breaking its news embargo, says it no longer feels obligated to abide by restrictions on when it can publish material from the journal. The decision was reached after the journal's editor Arnold S. Relman told Reuters that its airmail subscription would be suspended for 6 months. According to Desmond Maberly, executive editor of the British-owned agency's North American branch, the story in question was developed from Reuters' own sources. "The good doctor chose to imply that we broke an embargo which we never did." Therefore, he sees "no obligation" to continue to observe it.

The story that sparked the current flap concerned a much-publicized clinical trial that indicated that an aspirin every other day reduced the likelihood of heart attacks by 50% in a population of 11,000 physicians. The journal published the study in its 28 January issue. Reuters put out its story a day earlier.

Relman notified Reuters on 3 February that its special airmail subscription would be suspended for 6 months. (The agency is still allowed to have a regular subscription.) Airmail copies arrive several days before the regular subscription but the material is embargoed until the official publication date to give reporters time to prepare stories and to allow physicians to prepare for questions from their patients. Relman, in a letter to airmail subscribers, said Reuters' airmail service will be reinstated "assuming we can reach some agreement with them on what the embargo means."

At this point, there is some confusion on that score, because Reuters says the story was compiled from industry sources and not from the journal. Washington-based reporter Irwin Arieff says he got it from brokerage firms, trade associations, and pharmaceutical companies. "Information was widespread on Wall Street and among the companies that make aspirin," he says. He knew the article was forthcoming but "I never see or read" the *New England Journal*.

Relman's decision seems to indicate that the journal is trying to extend its authority to information it cannot control. He contends that Reuters "violated the spirit if not the letter of the embargo agreement." He says that even if the reporter did not see the study, he got information from people who had copies of the manuscript. "This is the first instance in which I thought and I still think that there was a deliberate decision made to violate the spirit of the embargo."

Relman says he has not yet received any

reply from the news agency. A Reuters press spokesman sounded conciliatory, saying "we want to be on good terms with other media so we take the journal's problem seriously." Maberly, however, did not seem to feel conciliation was in order: "If somebody cuts you off from a subscription and expects you to abide by an embargo you no longer have, there's a certain confusion you have to cut

through."

Relman has now made it clear that he intends to defend the embargo policy rigorously and has even indicated he will take action against anyone who supplies Reuters with material that is publicized before the specified date. However, if Reuters decides not to abide by the rules and other news organizations follow suit, Relman's hard-nosed stand could result in the collapse of the embargo policy. ■

CONSTANCE HOLDEN

Dividing the Pie at NSF

The National Science Foundation's quota of the cuts made by Congress in the cause of deficit reduction at the end of last year has left NSF with a 1988 budget that foundation director Erich Bloch calls "a major kind of disappointment." NSF had hoped to get the 17% boost in total funding requested for it by the Administration for the current fiscal year 1988—an increase to almost \$1.9 billion from the \$1.6 billion voted for 1987. Instead, congressional action held NSF's 1988 funds to \$1.7 billion.

In tailoring its coat to fit the cloth available, the foundation followed guidelines set by Bloch. Increases in the size of grants and in the number of awards to individual investigators were largely ruled out. New starts in funding for facilities were barred. The competition for the first of the foundation's much heralded science and technology centers will go forward but no awards for the interdisciplinary research centers will be made until fiscal year 1989.

A conspicuous exception to the rule of slow growth or no growth was the directorate for science and engineering education. The education directorate, beneficiary of congressional solicitude, received a 40% increase. Funding for education this year is \$139 million, compared with \$99 million last year, a surge largely attributable to a \$30-million item earmarked by Congress for precollege education.

In a recent speech, Bloch said that the funding increase for NSF this year amounts to about 6% overall. He said the rise in the research account, however, is less than 4%, which, taking into account the effect of inflation, amounts to a cut.

To live within its budget, NSF has apparently had to inform many grantees that they will be receiving less than the foundation indicated it would give them and they expected to get this year. The painful evidence seems to suggest that NSF's recent comfortable ride on the budget growth curve may be over. ■ JOHN WALSH

National Science Foundation FY 1988 budget plan by program activity (in thousands of dollars).

Program activity	FY 1987 actuals	Budget request	FY 1988 current plan
Mathematical and Physical Science	\$464,656	\$514,000	\$472,962
Engineering	163,077	205,000	170,697
Biological, Behavioral and Social Science	259,313	297,000	265,766
Geosciences	285,215	330,000	291,219
Computer and Information Science and Engineering	116,862	143,000	123,883
Scientific, Technological, and International Affairs	43,782	51,000	43,993
Program Development and Management	77,768	95,000	84,480
Subtotal, research and related activities	1,410,673	1,635,000	1,453,000
U.S. Antarctic Program	117,276	143,000	124,800
Science and Engineering Education	98,939	115,000	139,200
Special Foreign Currency	725	0	0
Total, National Science Foundation	\$1,627,613	\$1,893,000	\$1,717,000