Academy Opens Center in California

The National Academies of Sciences and Engineering now have an outpost in the West with the opening of the Arnold and Mabel Beckman Center in Irvine, California. It is hoped that the new facility will encourage scientists and engineers on the West Coast to participate more fully in the academies' programs, since roughly one-fourth of the 3400 active members of both the academies and the Institute of Medicine reside in California.

The 48,000-square-foot facility is the brainchild of Arnold Beckman, chairman of Beckman Instruments, Inc., a subsidiary of SmithKline Beckman Corporation, which produces analytical and electronic instruments for industry, science, and medicine. Beckman, who received his Ph.D. in photochemistry from Caltech, is the inventor of the *p*H meter. He and his wife donated $20 million for the construction and partial endowment of the center. The Irvine Company, a real estate and development firm based in Orange County, California, and owned by Donald L. Bren, donated the 7 acres upon which the center is built.

An inaugural series of symposia are planned. The topics: mathematics education, biological research and human values, energy in the 1990s, the economy and technology of the Pacific Rim, and prospects for providing affordable health care. ■ **W.B.**

More NSF Fellowships

The National Science Foundation has increased the number of new awards in its regular graduate fellowship program this year to 685, an increase of 180 over last year. The NSF fellowships cover 3 years of graduate study in the natural and social sciences, mathematics, and engineering. Stipends have been raised to $12,300 a year from $11,100 last year. NSF officials say the increase—amounting to $100 a month—was intended to compensate for an IRS ruling making fellowship income taxable. Institutions selected by the fellows receive a $6000 cost-of-education allowance in lieu of tuition and fees. Awards in the foundation's minority graduate fellowship program were increased to 75 this year from 55 last year. The number of fellowships offered under the regular program has been building up from a low point of 450 in 1983. The all-time high was 1998 in 1966. ■ **J.W.**

Out West. *The Arnold and Mabel Beckman Center is located in Irvine, California. Inside are a 256-seat auditorium, dining areas, and conference rooms.*

British and French Get Research Prescriptions

Both the British and French governments received strongly worded advice last week on how to increase the effectiveness of their biomedical research communities. Concern has been mounting in both countries about a loss of initiative in biotechnology to Japan and the United States and the two reports suggest in particular how to raise the contribution of basic research to the health of their respective pharmaceutical industries. But the thrust of the advice pointed in somewhat different directions.

The British comments came in a report from the select committee on science and technology of the House of Lords and is the result of an inquiry into the way priorities are selected in medical research. The committee's sharpest criticisms, however, are directed at the lack of adequate government funding for basic biomedical research in the United Kingdom, a situation which, it says, threatens "disastrous effects that will take years to rectify."

The French report had been commissioned by Prime Minister Jacques Chirac from René Sautier, the former president of the large chemical corporation Sanofi, and concentrates in particular on the development of biotechnology and its applications to human health, agriculture, and food processing.

Although pointing out that, under the conservative government, funding for biotechnology research has dropped over the past 2 years, Sautier is relatively restrained in his criticism. However, he has some harsh words to say on the strong institutional barriers that separate France's academic research community from the world of industry, claiming that the more the pharmaceutical industry comes to depend on the speedy applications of the fruits of basic research, the more these barriers will become a handicap in international competition.

Both reports address the question of an apparent imbalance between the rapid development of scientific knowledge generated by biomedical research, and the difficulties of finding ways that this knowledge can be effectively developed into practical applications aimed at meeting the needs of patients.

The House of Lords committee, for example, endorses the view of Britain's Medical Research Council that a "science-led approach should be dominant" in selecting research priorities. It points out that many of the witnesses who gave evidence to the committee over a period of 2 years drew attention to the studies by Julius H. Comroe, Jr., and Robert D. Dripps showing that the origins of clinical advances frequently came from basic research (*Science*, 9 April 1976, p. 105).

It expresses less satisfaction, however, about the role given to clinicians in determining medical research policy, arguing that "a wholly science-led approach cannot be effective," and repeating many of the views expressed by Lord Rothschild in the early 1970s (and at times firmly resisted by the MRC itself) that a greater "customer/contractor" approach to medical research is needed.

The MRC, says the committee, must "counter any tendency to spend too much on basic research when funds are short," particularly at a time when new techniques, including those derived from molecular biology, are pervading the whole range of medical research and becoming standard diagnostic tools. And it suggests the creation of a new, independently funded National Health Research Authority based on the principle that "the National Health Service is the main customer for research results and so it should commission research for which it sees a need."