

Briefings

edited by DAVID P. HAMILTON

FDA Panel Splits Decision on Drugs

Last week was a busy one for an advisory committee of the Food and Drug Administration, which returned a split decision on whether two much touted biotechnology drugs should be approved for marketing.

The panel turned thumbs down on interleukin-2 (IL-2), a drug that developer Cetus Corporation has promoted as an effective cancer treatment. The panel said Cetus needed to perform further studies with the drug before it could be considered for approval. Studies have shown that IL-2 shrinks tumors in 10 to 20% of kidney cancer patients, at the risk of severe and occasionally life-threatening side effects such as fluid retention.

Interferon alpha fared better. The FDA committee recommended approving the use of the naturally occurring substance for suppressing chronic non-A, non-B hepatitis. The Schering-Plough Corporation has been seeking FDA approval for interferon treatment of hepatitis since it developed a

method of producing the drug in genetically altered bacteria. Last year, nearly half of more than 200 patients treated with interferon alpha in two studies reported that the drug suppressed the liver infections caused by the hepatitis virus, although another half of those successfully treated later suffered relapses. Interferon treatment has also been known to enhance fatigue, cause mild to moderate hair loss, and lower white cell counts.

PNAS Bars Papers from UC Geneticist

Theodore Friedmann, a prominent geneticist at the University of California at San Diego, has been barred from publishing in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* for 3 years because he violated the publication's rules.

As first reported in the *San Diego Union*, the rare sanction was issued against Friedmann, a pediatrics researcher, because he published an article in *PNAS* in 1987 that described the same research as a paper he published shortly afterward in *Somatic Cell and Molecular Genetics*. The articles described a technique for inserting genes into rat liver cells that has since be-

come widely used.

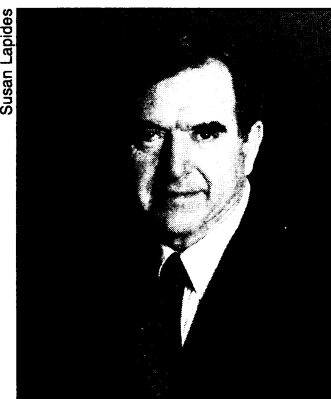
The primary problem, officials from both the university and the *PNAS* say, is that neither article contained any reference to the other. Furthermore, Friedmann's six coauthors were unaware that he had submitted the article to the second journal and did not learn of it until after publication. Frances R. Zwanzig, managing editor of *PNAS*, told the newspaper that the double publication was, in a manner of speaking, scientific misconduct.

Friedmann, 54, was reported to have acknowledged "errors in judgment." The *Union* reported that he admitted that he made a mistake in "lack of citation" and acknowledged that "the principle of consulting with coauthors was certainly violated." But, he told the newspaper, "it should be clear these errors were without ulterior motive. I had nothing to gain."

After learning of the problem earlier this year, Paul J. Friedman, dean of UCSD's School of Medicine, conducted an internal inquiry and determined that no action by the university was necessary. In fact, Friedman said, "we thought the journal punishment was fairly strong."

Theodore Friedmann is a member of the congressional Biomedical Ethics Advisory Committee.

on topics such as "patient dumping," a now outlawed practice in which hospitals refused to treat uninsured patients; the consequences of for-profit and investor-owned health care services; and the right to die.



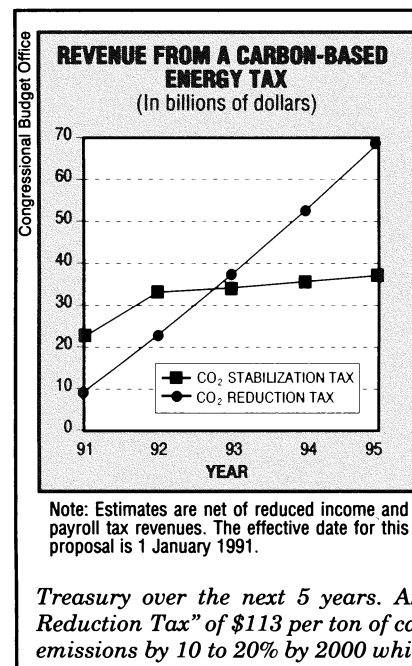
Arnold Relman. Stepping down after 14 years at *NEJM*.

Relman has already accepted a position at the Harvard Medical School, where he says he'll devote his time to teaching and writing about health care issues. "By the end of the decade, you'll see extreme changes in the way health care is provided and the way medicine is practiced. I want a chance to work hard and get involved in the national debate."

House Prunes Genome Budget

In today's tight fiscal climate, congressmen are apparently thinking twice about funding the Human Genome Initiative at the pace originally planned (*Science*, 29 June, p. 1600). On 19 July, the House Appropriations Committee voted to give the project \$71 million—\$42 million less than the \$108 million the administration had requested.

But the project could get some of that money back—if and only if President Bush gets around to appointing a director for the National Institutes of Health. The appropriations committee set aside \$18 million of a \$38 million discretionary fund for the genome project which can be used if the director decides the



Taxes on black stuff could be green. Economists have long known that taxes reduce consumer preferences for the taxed goods. So why not tax air pollutants? The Congressional Budget Office has determined that a tax on fossil fuels of only \$28 per ton of carbon content would not only discourage future increases in carbon dioxide emissions, but could go a long way toward reducing the federal budget deficit. Such a "CO₂ Stabilization Tax" might raise \$163 billion for the U.S.

Relman Hands Over the Reins at *NEJM*

"It's a good idea to leave when things are going well," says Arnold Relman, who, after nearly 14 years as editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, will step down on 1 July 1991. A search committee is expected to begin looking for Relman's successor within the month.

It has been an eventful decade and a half for Relman and the *NEJM*, which many consider to be the premier medical journal in the world today. Under Relman's guidance, *NEJM* broadened its focus into public health policy, stirring considerable public debate with articles