

Briefings

edited by JOSEPH PALCA

NIH Adjusts Attitudes Toward Women

The National Institutes of Health may have set a bad precedent by proving that a federal bureaucracy can respond quickly to an issue that even its proponents wouldn't call a global crisis. Less than 3 months after a General Ac-



Second hat. Ruth L. Kirschstein heads new women's office.

counting Office report criticized NIH for not paying enough attention to women's health issues (*Science*, 29 June, p. 1601), acting director Wil-

liam F. Raub announced last week he was creating an office of research on women's health at the top of the NIH hierarchy. Ruth L. Kirschstein, director of the National Institute of General Medical Sciences, will add the role of acting director of the new office until a permanent director is found.

Raub is taking the GAO criticisms so seriously that he plans to give the new office a separate line item in the 1992 budget and has vowed to find funds for it in his tight 1991 budget. He has also ordered that *NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts* be revised to strengthen the requirement that adequate numbers of women be included in federally funded studies. Kirschstein says the first thing on her agenda is to hold a series of conferences to determine what research areas are most in need of attention. She also plans a major conference sponsored by NIH on women's health to take place next year.

Raub's announcement came at a meeting between senior NIH staff and members of the Congressional Caucus for Women's Issues which had pushed for the GAO report. Representative Patricia Schroeder (D-CO), co-chair of the caucus and a vocal critic of previous

NIH policy, said she was "heartened by the speed with which NIH has moved to address our concerns."

Hyping Laser Angioplasty

A medical technique that uses a laser to unclog arteries has been so over promoted it could cause a "cynical backlash" among patients against doctors if the therapy doesn't live up to the raised expectations.

So says Bruce Perler, a surgeon at the Johns Hopkins University Hospital in Baltimore, writing in a recent issue of *The Journal of Vascular Surgery*. Perler worries that patients may be taken in by a form of what he calls false advertising being employed by hospitals where the laser technique is offered. He quotes one ad: when a laser is applied, "in an instant the blockage is vaporized." Another promises that an artery can be cleared in "seconds" with a laser device, contrasting it with the usual bypass operation that requires "a lengthy hospital recuperation."

This hype, Perler writes, "clearly misrepresents the mechanism of action of this

device." Perler says the laser technique isn't all that different from balloon angioplasty: the laser is only used to heat the metal tip of a surgical device that melts through fatty deposits in the artery so that a balloon device can be inserted. Furthermore, says Perler, the record of success is nothing to crow about. A 1986-1988 study at Hopkins resulted in 55% initially successful operations, but in 65% of these cases, the patients' arteries were blocked again within 14 months.

If doctors do not take steps to set the record straight, they risk a "general loss of credibility with the public and our overseers," warns Perler. "All of us must continue to scrutinize the published clinical data regarding new technologies," Perler concludes, to put a brake on "unbridled entrepreneurship."

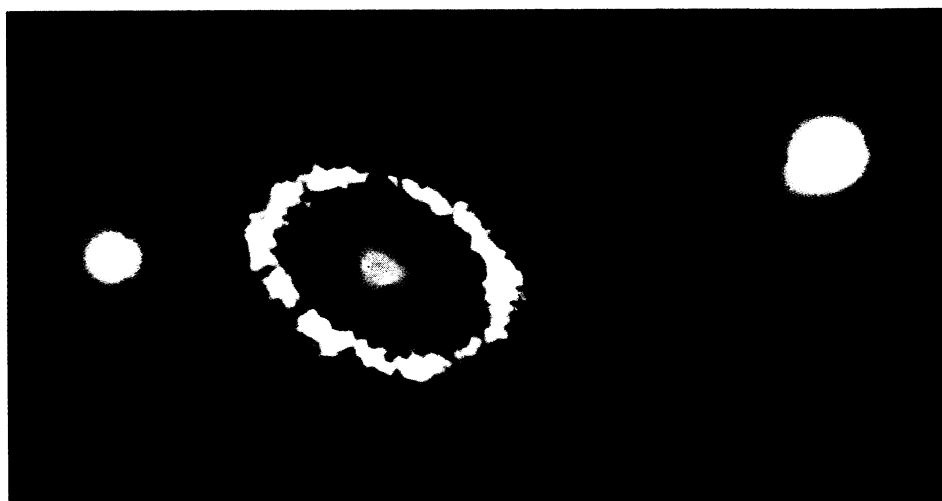
Salahuddin Pleads Guilty

AIDS researcher Syed Zaki Salahuddin will be sentenced next month by a federal judge after pleading guilty to illegally funneling contracts from the laboratory of Robert C. Gallo, where he worked for many years to a private company in which

Hubble Sees a Supernova

The Hubble Space Telescope may have blurred vision, but it continues to send home images of the universe that are far better than our best views from Earth. Even the telescope's Faint Object Camera—an instrument marred by the mirror mix-up—managed to give astronomers an unprecedented view: the shimmering ring of gas encircling the remnant of Supernova 1987A, the star that blew up in a dramatic light show in the nearby Large Magellanic Cloud.

Although astronomers had detected parts of the ring from the ground, the telescope gave them a clear view of the ring's structure for the first time, helping them fine-tune their theories about the events that led up to the death of the star. The ring was formed from the hydrogen-rich envelope that used to surround the red supergiant star. It was set aglow by the supernova explosion, which ionized its particles so they still are glowing at a temperature of more than 20,000 K.



Another image shows for the first time the ejecta thrown out from the star when it exploded. "The resolution's so good (0.1 arc second) that we can see the ejecta and material around the star," says Francesco Paresce, a senior astronomer at the Space Telescope Institute. Says Paresce: "We're quite amazed at how well the telescope is working."