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

NIGMS

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

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."

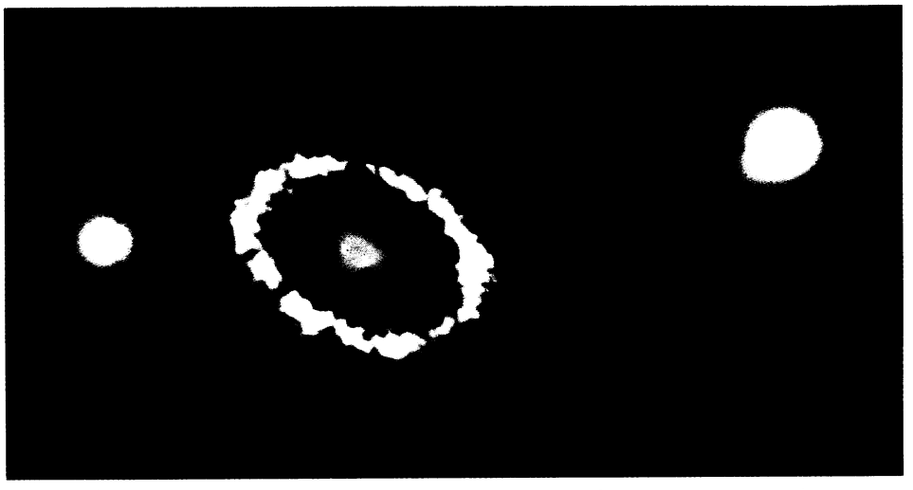
This hype, Perler writes, "clearly misrepresents the mechanism of action of this device." Perler says the laser technique isn't all that different from balloon angioplasty: the laser is only used to heat the metal tip of a surgical device that melts through fatty deposits in the artery so that a balloon 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% intially 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 entrepreneurism."

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."

his wife held stock. He also acknowledged that he received illegal payments from the company to paint his house and pay off a second mortage.

The Salahuddin case was the subject of congressional hearings in May before Representative John Dingell's (D–MI) subcommittee on oversight and investigations (*Science*, 11 May, p. 676). At the time, Salahuddin declined to testify on Fifth Amendment grounds, but other testimony then revealed that Salahuddin misinformed Gallo about his association with Pan-Data when questions were first raised in 1985.

In a presentencing report, the U.S. attorney for Maryland, who prosecuted the case, recommended that Salahuddin be fined $12,000—roughly the sum Pan-Data illegally paid him. The U.S. attorney also urged that Salahuddin be sentenced to 1750 hours of public service. It is possible that he will be able to spend these hours in the laboratory, working weekends on human herpes virus 6 on which he is expert.

Salahuddin, who was forced out of the National Institutes of Health, is now working at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles.

Social and Anti-Social Science

Social scientists were shaken by recent comments made by W. Glenn Campbell, the conservative economist from the Hoover Institution whom President Bush has nominated to the National Science Board. In published remarks, Campbell suggested that social scientists were already getting more money than they needed.

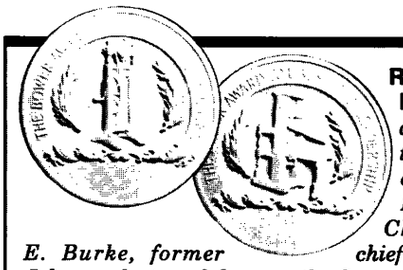
In an interview with the *Peninsula Times Tribune* of Palo Alto, California, Campbell said he was opposed to raising the National Science Foundation's social science budget: "I think they get enough money now." In another interview with the *Stanford Weekly*, Campbell took a swipe at econometric studies, which he considers a waste of money because they rely on "unreal assumptions to reach silly conclusions." He was traveling on a steamboat in Europe last week and could not be reached for further comment.

Choosing his words carefully, Howard Silver of the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA) said merely that Campbell's remarks "caused concern." As COSSA's executive director, Silver has been campaigning for years to get NSF to give the social and behavioral sciences more respect—and money. While funding for other sciences has increased almost 120% in the past 8 years, he says money for the social and behavioral sciences has remained "static."

But Silver says that, Campbell notwithstanding, there are signs that change may be in the wind. Two major groups—the American Psychological Association and the American Sociological Association—this summer called upon NSF to create a new directorate for the social and behavioral sciences. Representatives Doug Walgren (D–PA) and George Brown, Jr. (D–CA) introduced a bill (HR 5543) that would do just that. And the NSF has put together a 20-member panel to examine the entire structure of the present Directorate of Biological, Behavioral, and Social Sciences. The biologists, Silver says, dominate the scene, and they don't realize yet how much the behavioral scientists resent that situation. The panel's report is due out next year.

Stanford University

W. Glenn Campbell



Richest U.S. Science Prize. *Paul C. Lauterbur, a researcher at the Center for Advanced Study at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and James E. Burke, former chief executive at Johnson & Johnson, last week became the first ever winners of the Bower Awards for science and business.*

The new awards are part of the Benjamin Franklin National Memorial Awards program and will recognize a top scientist and a business leader who "embody the practical, entrepreneurial, and humanitarian spirit of Benjamin Franklin." Lauterbur's award is for his role in developing nuclear magnetic resonance spectroscopy and using that form of spectroscopy as an imaging tool in medicine. Burke wins the Bower business prize for his "innovative leadership" at Johnson & Johnson. The prize is a result of a bequest of $7.5 million by Henry Bower, a Philadelphia chemical manufacturer.

Here's a hint: try to win the science prize. The winner gets a 2½-inch gold medal and $290,000 in cash—the largest amount attached to any U.S. science prize. The winner of the business award just gets the medal.

Academy Tries No-Fault Defense

A plagiarism charge filed against the National Academy of Sciences by nutritionist-litigationist Victor Herbert last February has evoked a massive response. On 6 September, the academy lobbed back an inch-thick, 27-tab cannonade prepared by two of the academy's staff attorneys and three hired guns from the prestigious Washington, D.C., firm of Steptoe and Johnson.

The academy is seeking to have the case dismissed—not on some high moral ground saying it did nothing wrong, but on the (possibly) legally acceptable grounds that it was only following government orders.

Herbert accused the academy of publishing, without permission, his copyrighted work in its tenth edition of the *Recommended Dietary Allowances*. The panel of scientists originally assembled to prepare this bible of nutrition had gotten bogged down in a spat in 1985, and the academy settled it by rejecting everything they wrote. Then, in 1989, the academy published a rewritten version, including Herbert's chapter. In the interim, however, Herbert had copyrighted his material and he demanded the academy pay a fee of $300,000. Getting no satisfaction, he sued (*Science*, 2 March, p. 1022).

Normally, the academy likes to proclaim its independence from the federal government, but in this case, its lawyers are taking the opposite tack: "NIH/NIDDKD [the National Institutes of Health and the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases] mandated and controlled the academy's revision of the unapproved 1985 draft for inclusion in the tenth RDAs. NIH/NIDDKD's deep involvement in the process and the insistence that the unapproved 1985 draft be used left the academy with no discretion to pursue an alternative course... such as instituting a completely new effort, and indicates that the government implicitly authorized or consented to the actions taken by the academy." Or, more simply: the academy had no choice but to publish what NIH told it to publish. Therefore, if Herbert has a complaint, he should sue the U.S. government, not the academy.

A hearing date of 17 October has been set to consider the academy motion to dismiss Herbert's suit.