

Briefings

edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

NIH Watch

The Washington rumor mill is churning out gossip at a dizzying pace on Bernadine Healy's pending nomination as director of the National Institutes of Health. One week's log tells the story.

Monday afternoon. A call to *Science*: The White House is holding up Healy's nomination until it can resolve unspecified conflict-of-interest issues concerning her husband, cardiac surgeon Floyd Loop of the Cleveland Clinic Foundation where Healy is director of research.

Wednesday. All over Washington, it seems, people are talking about Healy and fetal research. According to the latest word, some high-level politico has "succumbed" to pressures from antiabortionists who are furious that Healy, said to be personally opposed to abortion, is not unalterably opposed to research using human fetal tissue.

Thursday. A call from an outraged policy-type who says that the blame for raising the fetal tissue (that is, abortion) issue lies with a nameless White House official. Don't blame Health and Human Services secretary Louis Sullivan or assistant secretary Jim Mason, he says. "I've heard they're trying to get the White House to back off."

Friday morning. *Science* is told that Healy's nomination has "just been sent to the Hill," meaning that the White House has sent an official letter of nomination to the Senate which must confirm the appointment.

Friday afternoon. Another call from a "knowledgeable source" who has been out of town all week. "Have you heard that Healy's nomination is being held up by the right-to-lifers who got to someone in the White House?" he asks.

Yes, we've heard. We've also

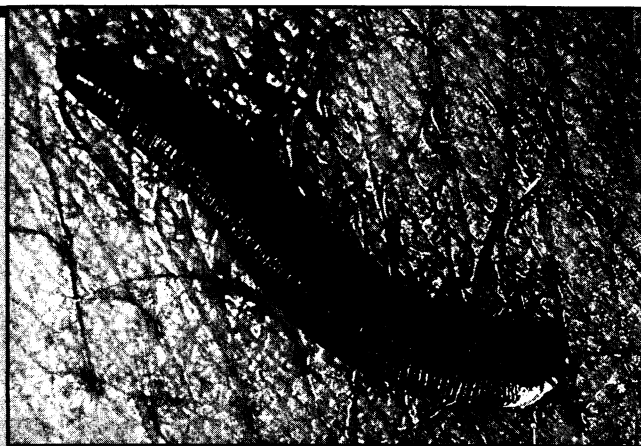
Celebrating the Leech

In '83 it was an endangered species, but by decade's end it had become the darling of journalists amused to learn that scientists had rediscovered an animal with a 2000-year history of use in medicine. Now the slimy species has earned its own scientific congress: the International Conference on Biomedical Horizons of the Leech to be held in Charleston, South Carolina, on 24 to 28 October.

Leeches have come a long way since the early 1980s, when interest in the animals was spurred in large part by a Strasbourg hand surgeon, Guy Foucher, who used them to stimulate circulation in reattached fingers. Medicinal leeches are now turning up all over the world, thanks to Biopharm—the Welsh sponsor of the conference—which set up the world's only leech breeding facility in 1984.

Nowadays leeches are being increasingly used with microsurgery—it seems that, to avoid pain-

ful swelling and bloodclotting after replantation or transplantation of a severed body part, there is nothing like a leech, which not only drains off fluids but also secretes an anesthetic and an anticoagulant. Leech saliva is beginning to yield a host of desirable substances, including antibiotics and possible anticancer agents. Leeches are also coming into their own in neuroscience research.



Grant Heilman

heard that the nomination has been sent to the Hill. As we go to press 5 days later, neither claim has received an iota of confirmation.

Anti-Asian Bias Seen at UCLA

The Department of Education has concluded that the University of California at Los Angeles has been discriminating against Asian Americans in admissions to its graduate mathematics department.

The finding, the result of a 30-month compliance review, is the first federal finding of discrimination against Asians in higher education.

In a letter to UCLA chancellor Charles E. Young, the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has told the university to admit five Asian-American applicants that it says were "discriminatorily denied admission." UCLA must also keep detailed records for the next 3 years on admissions decisions in the math department as well as in eight graduate programs where the OCR said there was "insufficient data" to be able to determine compliance.

Young has defended the university's practices and criticized the study, which was limited to domestic students, for "completely dismissing" the large number of foreign-born Asians in the department. He said the university will appeal the finding to an administrative law judge.

Asian-Americans, who make up 2% of the U.S. population, constitute about 15% of UCLA's 15,000 graduate students. Nonetheless, in the mathematics department, the OCR found "a statistical disparity in the rates of admission. . . on the basis of race, an inconsistency in how Asian and white applicants who received the same evaluation ratings were treated, and insufficient evidence to show a nondiscriminatory basis for this pattern."

In the course of its review, the OCR looked at 84 separate graduate programs with 95 separate admissions processes. It zeroed in on the math department when it found that white applicants were admitted at higher rates in 1987 and 1988. After reviewing student files over a 3-year period, it discovered, for example, that in 1988, 5 of 112 white applicants were

denied admission despite ratings of 3.0 or above, while 6 of 27 Asian applicants were similarly turned down. The OCR was not satisfied with the math department's explanations, which it found to be inconsistent and sometimes unrelated to stated admissions criteria. For instance, the OCR said that in marginal cases, some white females received a "gender-based boost" that was not accorded Asian females.

The education department isn't through with UCLA yet. It is continuing an investigation of the university's undergraduate admissions practices. One other university—Harvard—has also been getting an Asian compliance review. Results of that are expected "in days," says an OCR spokesman.

Fusion Fans Keep Fighting

Despite meager budgets, snail-like progress, and a slew of unkind words directed at the fusion program by, among others, the National Research Council, fusion scientists are still bullish. Just how bullish can be seen in the final report of