

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

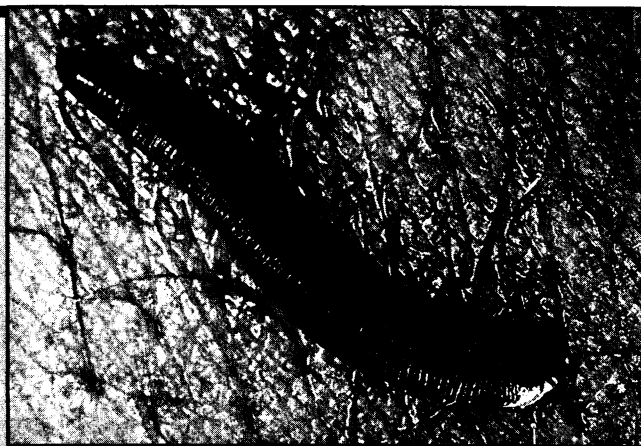
Celebrating the Leech

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

the Department of Energy's Fusion Policy Advisory Committee (FPAC), a document which outlines some ambitious goals—namely, building a demonstration fusion power plant by 2025 and a commercial plant by 2040.

To reach this "reasonable and attainable" peak, FPAC says that the combined federal fusion budget must climb to \$1 billion a year in constant dollars (the current DOE fusion budget is just over \$480 million). To focus research better, FPAC recommends organizing DOE's efforts into a single Office of Fusion Energy that would oversee both magnetic and inertial confinement research into energy applications. "Pursuing both options at this time reduces the technical risk," the report states.

The FPAC also emphasizes the need for cooperation in efforts such as the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor project (ITER), a joint U.S.-European-Soviet-Japanese program. ITER is in the process of completing its "conceptual

design" phase. If the members reauthorize the program, ITER will proceed with a 5-year, \$1-billion "engineering design activity" phase that will produce a design for a working reactor.

Skepticism Urged on Soviet Psychiatry

Even as a delegation of Soviet psychiatrists and other officials arrived on 24 September for a 2-week tour to learn about U.S. psychiatry, Sovietologist Peter Reddaway of George Washington University was circulating an open letter warning that it would be premature to assume that the Soviet psychiatric establishment has put its own house in order.

Reddaway says reform within the Soviet Union has made little headway so far and notes that the 20-member delegation, headed by Yuri Reshetov of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is mostly made up of "establishment" figures. He sees as particularly ominous the fact that Marat Vartanyan, the psychia-

trist chiefly associated with alleged political abuses of psychiatry, is still riding high as director of the Soviet Union's primary mental health research center. Nonetheless, Reddaway says "pressures are building up" in support of the psychiatric reform movement within the country and there are a few positive signs of change: for example, G. Morozov, who with Vartanyan has been the most prominent among the old guard, has retired as director of the Serbsky Institute of Forensic Psychiatry; and the Soviets' new reform-minded Independent Psychiatric Association is now a member of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA).

How the rest of the world perceives progress in the Soviet Union will be crucial as the WPA prepares to decide whether the Soviet All-Union Society of Psychiatrists should be allowed to remain in that organization. The Soviets resigned from the WPA in 1984 under threat of expulsion, but were readmitted at the WPA meeting in Athens last October on the condition

that they clean up their act. A WPA delegation is to visit the U.S.S.R. early next year to see how they are doing.

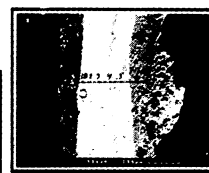
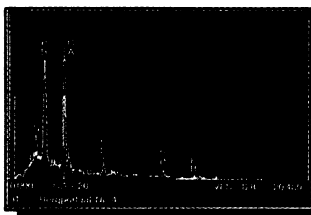
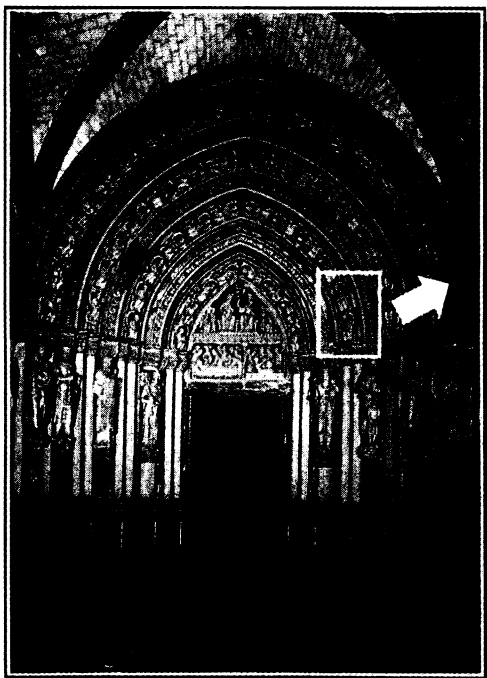
The current Soviet visit is part of an agreement that enabled American experts to make an unprecedented foray into the Soviet Union last year to investigate reports of psychiatric abuse (*Science*, 24 March 1989, p. 1547).

Demolishing the Layer Cake

The National Science Foundation calls it "perhaps the most far-reaching science education reform effort in the United States since the Sputnik era of the 1950s." That's the Scope, Sequence and Coordination (SS&C) program, an attempt to revolutionize high school science that has been spearheaded by the National Science Teachers Association (*Science*, 31 August, p. 978).

On 27 August the NSF announced five grants totaling \$8.6 million for SS&C, which was launched earlier with \$1.6 million from the Department of Education for programs conducted by the California Department of Education and Baylor College of Medicine. Three-year NSF grants of about \$1.4 million apiece are now going to California, Baylor, the University of Iowa, the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, and the University of Puerto Rico as well as to the NSTA which will be coordinating and assessing activities.

At a press conference held at NSF, NSTA executive director Bill Aldridge said the United States is "the only industrialized nation in the world" still hanging on to the despised "layer cake" approach which exposes high school students to only one science subject per year. SS&C programs will expose all students to all major branches of science every year. Luther Williams, NSF's new assistant director for education and human resources, said time spent in science courses could be increased up to 50%.



Unraveling Rembrandt. For centuries, art historians have studied the techniques of great artists in order to identify new works and to expose fakery. Now they have high-tech help from the Dutch company DSM, in conjunction with the Rembrandt Research Project Foundation and the Stichting Restauratie Atelier Limburg Foundation. The trio is bringing to bear an arsenal of scientific instruments in a 5-year project to trace the source and

composition of the pigments and binding agents used by Rembrandt van Rijn and other 17th-century Dutch masters. In the sequence pictured, a layer of paint from the St. Servatius Basilica in Maastricht, the Netherlands, is subjected to (clockwise from the eye) light microscopy at $\times 35$, scanning electron microscopy, and mass spectrometry for element analysis.