

## Healy Scolded Over Cleveland Case

Critics of Bernadine Healy, director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), have some new ammunition: Federal investigators have concluded that she mishandled a scientific misconduct inquiry in 1990. The final report on the case, released last week by the Office of Research Integrity (ORI), criticized Healy for deviating from federal guidelines when she headed an inquiry of a researcher at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation, whose research institute she directed until joining NIH in April 1991.

Healy's initial inquiry cleared the medical researcher, Rameshwar Sharma, of misconduct, although it found "misstatements" and what it called "anticipatory writing"—touting data that hadn't yet been acquired—in a grant application Sharma had written. But after Sharma complained that he had been treated unfairly, Healy commissioned a second inquiry, which recommended a formal investigation.

After a series of other investigations reached varying conclusions on the case, ORI has now decided that Sharma's actions did amount to scientific misconduct, but it faulted Healy's original inquiry more for its procedures than its verdict. For example, ORI says Healy erred in selecting potentially biased inquiry panel members and failing to inform Sharma that a formal inquiry was being launched.

Healy declined to comment, but Ralph Straffon, chief of staff at the Cleveland Clinic, concedes, "We didn't follow [the guidelines] to the letter as we should." He explains that the clinic had adopted the guidelines only a few months earlier and was still "learning" how to apply them in 1990. ORI's report acknowledges that this was a mitigating factor.

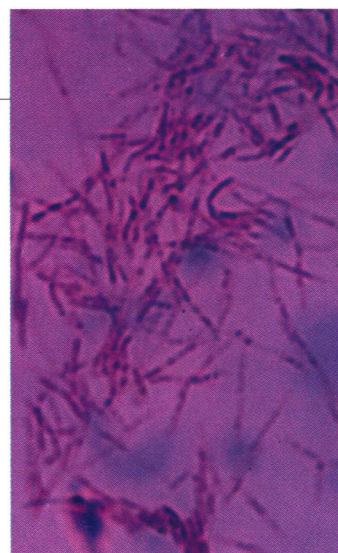
Representative John Dingell (D-MI), who held a hearing on the case in August 1991, is still professing outrage. Last week he fired off a 10-page letter to ORI, accusing it of going easy on Healy.

## NIH to Build Special TB Facility

Seeking a higher profile in the fight against the emerging tuberculosis (TB) epidemic, NIH officials are about to request proposals for the construction of a special clean room at NIH that would enable researchers to do otherwise dangerous studies on TB transmission.

NIH first addressed the rising incidence of TB in a workshop last February. Several research goals laid out then require airborne transmission of the TB mycobacteria, including the development of an animal model for vaccine research. To make such studies possible, workshop participants called for construction of a top-rated hazard containment facility, designated Biosafety Level 4 (BL-4).

The proposal lay fallow until last August, when Lance Liotta, NIH deputy director of intramural research, was asked what should be done with NIH's outdated BL-3 facility. Liotta says it didn't take long to decide to upgrade the facility for the TB work. What did take a while was find-



**Airborne threat.** NIH plans to build a special lab for handling TB.

ing the \$2 million for the renovation, which recently was skimmed from royalties NIH gets from the AIDS blood test.

Liotta refuses to estimate how long it will take to select a construction firm and build the BL-4 facility, although he says it's on a "very, very fast track." But he and other NIH officials already have begun to envision the facility as a means to "recruit more minds to work on drug-resistant TB," he says.

## IOM Encounters Poison-Gas Curtain

In most inquiries, the National Research Council and its sister organization, the Institute of Medicine (IOM), have no trouble extracting the information they need for a report, even if it means interviewing tight-lipped sources in the Department of Defense (DOD).

But in a recent study of DOD's use of human subjects to test chemical weapons, IOM researchers did not encounter full candor.

According to a report\* released earlier this week, DOD denied the IOM committee ac-

\*Veterans at Risk: The Health Effects of Mustard Gas and Lewisite, Institute of Medicine, 1993.

cess to key data on the health effects of mustard gas and Lewisite (an arsenic-based liquid). The committee, chaired by David Rall, a former director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, had been asked by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to examine health problems linked to tests that began in

the mid-1940s. The VA compensates test subjects for seven conditions, including emphysema and laryngitis.

The committee had sharp words for DOD, stating that it found "an atmosphere of lingering secrecy." During an 11-month study, only one of the three major test sites—the Naval Research Laboratory—allowed IOM access to its records. Some testing documents remain classified, while others have been declassified but remain inaccessible to the public, the report states.

Despite these obstacles, the IOM group collected enough data to recommend that the VA compensate veterans for 13 additional test-related health problems, including lung cancer. But the full toll may never be known: Committee members note that without seeing all the test protocols, it's impossible to say how many soldiers were exposed to the toxins or what doses they received.

## Dim Future for Misconduct Panel

The findings of misconduct against AIDS researcher Robert Gallo (see story on p. 168) by the Department of Health and Human Services would seem to be a golden opportunity to try out an idea recommended last April by a committee of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS)—that the scientific community should seek insight from an independent group called the Scientific Integrity Advisory Board (SIAB). But there's one small hitch: The SIAB doesn't exist yet.

An NAS panel on misconduct chaired by former presidential science adviser Edward David Jr. recommended that the scientific community create the SIAB to, among other things, draw up policies for handling and assessing misconduct cases.

But efforts to create the SIAB have since flagged, the news service *Washington Fax* reported last month. The reason, as NAS president Frank Press told *Science*: The scientific community is "lukewarm" to the idea. Press says the academy recently sent letters to 30 prominent scientists, "looking for intellectual support" for the SIAB, but instead got "very few positive responses." Why the chilly reception? David says that some scientists believe the SIAB might exceed its authority or focus undue attention on scientific misconduct. But, he laments, "we're not trying to set up a Gestapo."

The SIAB could still become a reality, but don't expect to see it any time soon. Press' forecast: "We might resurrect the idea down the road a piece."