

edited by RICHARD STONE



**Reproductive risk?** NIOSH will look at cancer rates in children of nuclear plant workers, including the possible role of radiation-damaged sperm.

## U.S. to Explore Dad's Rads, Child Cancer Link

Do the children of men exposed to radiation at nuclear plants run an especially high risk of getting cancer? The U.S. government hopes to answer that question with a 2-year, \$500,000 study set to begin next month.

For years, few scientists believed that men exposed to low levels of radiation might transmit (via their sperm or semen) radiation-damaged genetic material to their offspring. But in 1990, epidemiologist Martin Gardner surprised colleagues when he reported that children of workers at the Sellafield nuclear plant in England were more likely to get leukemia than children of non-exposed men. The confusion grew last year, when a Canadian study found no such elevated risk in children of workers at four Canadian nuclear power plants (*Science*, 2 October 1992, p. 31).

Now Uncle Sam wants to pitch a tent in one of the two camps. Next month, the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) will begin to examine cases of childhood leukemia around the 49-year-old Hanford Site in Richland, Washington, one of the oldest U.S. nuclear plants. Richland is a good place to explore a link between childhood leukemia and parental exposure to radiation because the Hanford work force has received over the years "a sizable measure of radiation," says study director Lowell Sever, an epidemiologist with Battelle Pacific Northwest Laboratories in Richland, which NIOSH is funding to do the study.

After the Battelle team finishes its work at Hanford, sometime in 1994 or 1995, it plans to look at neighborhoods near nuclear facilities in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and Aiken, South Carolina.

## VA Medical Research to Take Big Hit

You may think the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is the big loser in President Bill Clinton's 1994 budget. But at least NIH's budget is supposed to grow (albeit by a modest 3.2%). Not so for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), which conducts research on everything from the effects of combat stress on veterans' mental health to the electrical properties of heart tissue. Unless Congress intercedes, the VA plans to spend 11% less on medical research next year.

The numbers cast a shadow over the coming days of VA medical research. The Clinton Administration proposes to shrink the VA's budget for medical, rehabilitation, and health services research from \$232 million in 1993 to \$206 million in 1994. Take a closer look and the numbers get scarier: The VA plans to fund about 700 fewer projects in

1994 (1389) compared to this year (2060). According to a VA spokeswoman, this means the VA is unlikely to fund any new research projects in 1994.

VA top brass insist the cuts won't harm veterans research. In testimony before a House appropriations subcommittee earlier this month, VA Secretary Jesse Brown said the "VA will make every effort to ensure that VA's research efforts are not compromised."

This view, however, is disputed by a VA official who spoke with *Science* on condition of anonymity. He says that in the past few years the research program has begun to shift from basic to more applied research, as top VA officials desired. "We keep hearing that funding will get better next year. But we've been hearing that for years," he says. Now VA medical researchers will have to make some friends in Congress fast.

## NIH to Clarify Rules for Tenure

Three things are certain in the lives of junior academic researchers: death (eventually), taxes (annually), and tenure (that is, learning that you are or aren't on track to get it). Not so for young postdocs at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), who've never had a clear idea of how to earn tenure, because NIH has never articulated a formal tenure policy. Until now.

Sometime in the next few

months, Lance Liotta, NIH deputy director for intramural research, plans formally to establish a tenure track. "Previously, everybody hoped they were on [tenure track] but didn't know," says Philip Chen, NIH's associate director for intramural affairs. Tenure candidates will get 6 years to prove themselves, and enough funds to work independently. The policy also proposes a "stop-the-clock" rule that would allow scientists to take family leave without jeopardizing their chances of earning tenure.

Outgoing NIH Director Bernadine Healy has approved the policy. Now it's under review by rank-and-file NIH researchers, 44 of whom received tenure last year. While Liotta says the policy won't increase the odds of getting tenure, few postdocs are likely to oppose it. "A number of people I know have been taken off tenure track" without knowing what criteria they should have met, complains one NIH postdoc. "If [the policy] is not just a window-dressing exercise, it'll be very good for NIH," he says.

## Get Your C.V. and a Pen Handy

**Help Wanted:** Seeking a thick-skinned scientist with extensive managerial experience. Must be willing to abandon personal research projects, see family less frequently, and endure relentless scrutiny. Must possess a Ph.D. or M.D. degree and be able to juggle needs of 16,000 employees, balance a \$10 billion annual budget, and speak to the media all at the same time. Firefighting experience a plus. Must be fluent in both English and Science, and forceful in explaining to Congress why you deserve a bigger budget. Must be willing to relocate to Bethesda, Maryland (at least during the work week) and able to make ends meet on \$115,700 to \$148,400 a year. Applications encouraged from nonsmoking Democrats who can get along

with Representative John Dingell.

If the shoe fits, you may soon be wearing the title of NIH director. Much of the foregoing description is contained in a "vacancy announcement" being sent to more than 800 federal offices, academic institutions, and scientific bigdomes to help a five-person committee find a successor to NIH Director Bernadine Healy. "This is intended to make sure no realistic candidate is overlooked," says Robert Dennis, a Public Health Service official who is receiving applications.

The 1 April letter asks that recommendations and resumes be submitted by 23 April, indicating that the Clinton Administration hopes to fill the job by 30 June, the latest date Healy said she'd stay at the helm.