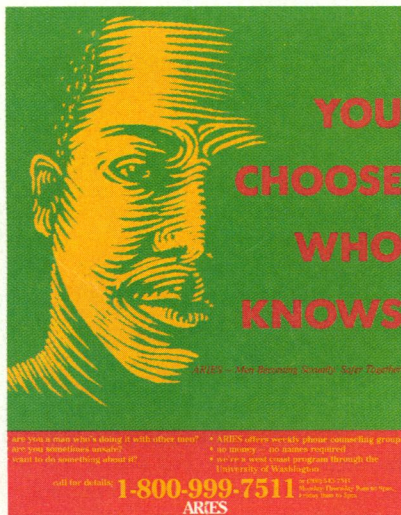


edited by RICHARD STONE



Congress May Hang Up On AIDS Hotline

Last May, Senator Robert C. Byrd (D-WV) angered many a scientist when he sponsored a bill that would have canceled 34 federally funded, peer-reviewed research projects, mainly in the social sciences. But he couldn't persuade his colleagues to go along with the execution, and a majority spared those studies from the gallows. Now, it's the House that wants to throw the hood over a peer-reviewed social science project—a controversial study of an AIDS counseling service being funded by the National Institute of Mental Health.

The death sentence was proposed last month, when the House passed an amendment to the National Institutes of Health reauthorization bill that would kill Project Aries, a \$1.2 million study of whether phone counseling can help convince men to practice safe sex. A team of therapists led by Roger Roffman, an associate professor at the University of Washington, advise gay and bisexual men about safe-sex methods during a series of 14 conference calls. The men then answer questionnaires, spaced over a year, that are designed to flag changes in their sexual behavior.

The 3-year-old project drew little attention until last September, when the *New York Guardian* ran an article trashing the study. Headlined "Dial 1-800-SOD-OMY," the story alleged that Project Aries "advocates a homo-

Poster provocateur. Ads for AIDS counseling service have drawn conservative fire.

sexual lifestyle." Seizing on this, Representative Sam Johnson (R-TX) crafted the amendment to guillotine the fourth (and final) year of Project Aries.

The amendment's passage has appalled some AIDS researchers. "As soon as Congress begins to interfere in the peer-review system, we're dead in the water," complains Thomas

Coates, director of the Center for AIDS Prevention Studies at the University of California, San Francisco. But an 11th-hour reprieve for Project Aries may be in store. As *Science* went to press, some members of Congress were hoping to cut a deal in a conference between the House and Senate on the reauthorization bill that would spare Aries' last year.

New Euro Agency May Speed Grant Awards

It's the number one gripe of scientists who appeal to the European Community (EC) for funding: To apply for an EC grant, they have to diligently fill out reams of paperwork, then wait months on end for a decision. But relief from red tape may soon arrive, if three of Europe's top research agencies succeed in their bold bid to take over the management of the EC's programs in basic science.

France's Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), Germany's Max Planck Society, and Spain's National Research Council plan to form a new organization called Euro Recherche that—provided they get the nod from Brussels—will use these national agencies' well-oiled procedures for grant evaluation at the European level. CNRS director-general François Kourilsky says Euro Recherche could be up and running in a few weeks. All it needs, he says, is a small secretariat to handle the administration and a governing council of leading researchers from across

the EC to safeguard against national bias in distributing grants.

Officials in the European Commission, the EC's executive branch, confirm that they are studying several proposals to other European agencies. This means Euro Recherche may not have the grant-management field to itself. "There's a lot of jockeying for position going on," says one EC official.

Clinton Budget Hurts LBL's Fusion Program

A cut of less than \$4 million may sound the end to an upstart branch of fusion research. For whom does the bell toll? The civilian inertial confinement fusion (ICF) program at the Department of Energy (DOE), and many of the program's 50 researchers at the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory (LBL).

For several years the LBL team has been designing a heavy-ion accelerator as a cheap alternative to DOE's Tokamak fusion and laser fusion programs. Unlike Tokamak reactors, which employ magnetic fields to contain energy-producing plasmas, and lasers, which compress pellets of hydrogen isotopes until they fuse, heavy-ion ICF would generate its

Watts by bombarding isotopes with a beam of heavy atoms such as potassium. Researchers were hoping to demonstrate heavy-ion fusion technology with the induction linac systems experiments accelerator, which LBL planned to start building in 1995.

But now the Clinton Administration has proposed to cut the \$8 million ICF program in half in 1994. An outside panel of experts, DOE's Fusion Energy Advisory Committee, warned in a report earlier this month that at the proposed funding level, "there is no credible program for the development of a heavy-ion fusion option" (emphasis in original). Echoing that view is LBL program director Roger Bangerter, who says that the funding cut would mean that about 25 team members would lose their jobs, effectively halting the project.

But ICF's boosters aren't quite ready to give up the ghost. Some of them plan to lobby both DOE and Congress in the hope of getting DOE to rob from the rich and give to the poor—that is, transfer to the civilian ICF a few million from the \$188 million requested for laser fusion research in DOE's defense program.

Amgen to Launch Immunology Institute

The biotechnology industry has been quivering in fear ever since March, when President Bill Clinton began hinting that one way to rein in health care costs might be to set federally mandated price controls on new drugs. But that fear has failed to paralyze at least one biotech company—Amgen Inc., which is forging ahead with plans to launch an institute devoted to basic research in immunology and related fields.

The Amgen Institute will be housed at Toronto's Ontario Cancer Institute (OCI) and funded to the tune of \$10 million a year for 10 years. Heading up the institute will be OCI virologist Tak Mak, who discovered the T cell receptor in the mid-1980s. Mak says that in the next couple of weeks he'll begin screening job applications from scientists interested in immunoregulation, immunorecognition, and neurobiology.

If Amgen's move seems contrary to the batten-down-the-hatches attitude of most biotech firms these days, consider this: Amgen, based in Thousand Oaks, California, is one of only a handful of companies with any biotech drug on the market, actually raking in more than \$1 billion in sales from two drugs last year. "The threat of price controls obviously concerns us, but it hasn't changed the way we're running the company," says Daniel Vapnek, Amgen's senior vice president for research.



Amgen's man. Tak Mak to head institute.