RANDOM SAMPLES

edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

Zagury Probe Concluded

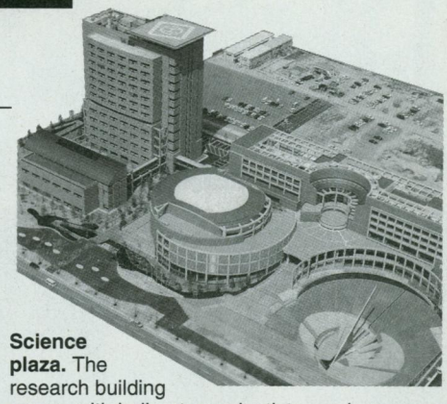
Two world-class AIDS researchers will at last be able to collaborate again, free of the layers of review that were imposed on them by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) more than 2 years ago (*Science*, 19 July 1991, p. 255). After one of its longest and most complicated investigations involving experiments with human subjects, NIH has lifted the restrictions on Daniel Zagury of the Pierre and Marie Curie University in Paris and Robert Gallo of the National Cancer Institute, stating that "based on information provided by the French government...no additional actions...are warranted." This is less than an exoneration, and along the way NIH itself has been criticized by its own investigators.

The two AIDS researchers were scrutinized by NIH's Office for Protection from Research Risks (OPRR), which began investigating them in July 1990 in response to allegations raised by *The Chicago Tribune* that Zagury, using reagents from Gallo, had improperly conducted human AIDS vaccine trials in France and Zaire. But the probe never got to the bottom of the charges against Zagury—particularly that he had tested his vaccine in Zaire on young children without any government approval—in part because the French government did not believe he had violated any of its rules or that it needed to cooperate with a U.S. government probe. Further, in Zaire, a French-led review of Zagury's work was foiled by political unrest.

At the same time, however, the investigation has led to changes for NIH's intramural research program. The 26 March report, stating that NIH suffers from "a disjointed, compartmentalized system of human subject protections," ordered the intramural program to assign a point person to oversee all such projects. NIH has also, at OPRR's behest, established a new Office of Human Subjects Research to monitor related intramural projects, coordinate the dozen in-house institutional review boards, and educate involved scientists.

Japan Science City Shapes Up

First came Tsukuba City, one of the world's first science cities to be built from the ground up. Now comes Kansai Science City, a sprawling 15,000 hectare tract lying in a forested region in the midst of a triangle described by Kyoto, Osaka, and Nara (*Science*, 23 October 1992, p. 572). Late last month saw the opening of the city's nucleus: Keihanna Plaza, an international research facility cum cultural center. There's still room to rent in the plaza's 13-story research building, which has 20,754 square meters of lab space as well as a vibration-free "super laboratory building" housing top-class clean rooms and chemical disposal systems. The new plaza also aims to be a cultural hotbed, host to seminars and conventions as well as performances of music, dance, and drama. An international music festival is scheduled for this August. A consortium of 170 private companies has put up 56% of the capital for the plaza; the rest is Japanese government money. Kansai Science City is woven among many villages in the area, to avoid being like the self-contained and, some say, rather colorless Tsukuba Science City.



Science plaza. The research building comes with heliport so scientists can hop over to the Kansai international airport now being built. The low round building is the convention/concert hall. The giant sundial is winner of a contest to design a work of art for the area.

Firing Up the Brain Decade

The Decade of the Brain is in its fourth year, but although brain research is hotter than ever—witness recent discoveries of genes for Huntington's disease and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis—the federal neuroscience research budget is scheduled to decline by 1.5% next year. People just haven't caught on to "the reality...that these are the most costly of all illnesses," says Maxwell Cowan, vice president of Howard Hughes Medical Institute.

What to do? Last fall, under the auspices of the Charles A. Dana Foundation, former genome project director James Watson invited some top neuroscientists up to Cold Spring Harbor where they forged the Dana Alliance for Brain Initiatives, a public education campaign announced last week in Washington, D.C. The group, whose vice chairmen are Watson and Cowan, aims to make people as knowledgeable about brain disorders as they are about cancer or heart disease. According to a Dana-commissioned poll, 86% of people know someone with a neurological disease, brain injury, or mental illness. But only 21% have any understanding of brain disorders (compared with 55% for cancer). And only one in four can identify the brain as the source of conditions ranging from schizophrenia to stroke.

Brain dumb. Responses to the question: "When you think about brain-related diseases and health problems, what specific illnesses and problems come to mind?"

Condition	% of correct mentions
Brain tumor	52
Alzheimer's disease	41
Stroke	8
Parkinson's disease	6
Dementia	3
Memory loss	3
Depression	3

The alliance has made a list of 10 advances it expects will be realized by 2000, including identification of genes for Alzheimer's disease and manic depression; new ways to enhance nerve regeneration; new agents to treat addictions; and new pain treatments. Fred Plum of New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center says, for example, that the development of a nontoxic glutamate antagonist could reduce brain cell damage from injury or stroke by 30% to 75%. On the agenda of the alliance, fueled by $25 million in Dana money over the next 3 years, are news briefings, a TV series, and public symposia, the first of which, on Alzheimer's disease, will be held in New York City in June.

Science Proves Iraqi Gas Attack

Saddam Hussein has for years denied using nerve gas and other chemical weapons to attack Iraq's Kurds, but researchers at UK Ministry of Defence's Porton Down chemical and biological defense lab think they've now proved him a liar. Last week they announced that analysis of soil and bomb fragments obtained by Boston-based Physicians for Human Rights from the Kurdish village of Brijini, bombed in 1988, showed traces of mustard and nerve gas. They claim this is the first time that scientists have been able to obtain direct chemical evidence of a chemical weapons attack through the scrutiny of environmental residues.

Such residues typically break down within hours, so scientists had assumed that looking for them years later would be fruitless. But earlier this year the Porton Down group ran soil and metal samples from bomb craters through a battery of high-sensitivity gas chromatography/mass spectrometry tests. The result: "unequivocal" traces of mustard gas as well as breakdown products of the nerve agent GB, also known as Sarin.