SCIENCESCOPE

edited by RICHARD STONE

Thailand to Test Controversial Vaccine

In a move that breathes new life into an experimental AIDS vaccine developed by San Francisco's Genentech Inc., Thailand is planning to launch clinical trials of the preparation next month.

Until last June, the Genentech vaccine was a lead candidate to be among the first AIDS vaccines subjected to an efficacy trial—a full-scale test that requires vaccinating several thousand people who are at high risk of HIV infection. But the vaccine—a genetically engineered version of HIV's surface protein gp120—fell on hard times when an advisory panel to the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases voted against submitting it to an efficacy trial in the United States (*Science*, 24 June, p. 1839).

Now, the World Health Organization (WHO), Thailand's Mahidol University, and Genentech have agreed to stage a trial of the vaccine in Thailand in 30 former IV drug users, 10 of whom will receive a placebo. Although the vaccine has already been tested in similar U.S. studies, WHO epidemiologist William Heyward says the new one is significant because it signals that Thailand is willing to move the vaccine into efficacy trials.

The 30-person test awaits approval from a Thai oversight committee. If all goes well, says Heyward, a true efficacy trial could begin as early as mid-1996.

PETER MENZEL

Quixotic technology? White House to hold conference on how to profit from windmills and other sustainable technologies.

OSTP Conference to Explore "Sustainability"

For the past year, the Clinton Administration has talked up a storm about bolstering U.S. efforts in two fuzzy industrial sectors: environmental technology and sustainable development. Now the White House is ready to clarify how scientists can contribute to these fields. From 13 to 14 December, the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) will hold an invitation-only bull session in Washington, D.C., on "sustainable technologies."

The meeting is intended to help the White House "ensure that federal R&D programs are on the cutting edge 20 years from now," says OSTP's Mark Schaefer. Beefing up basic research may help U.S. industry increase its share of a $300-billion global market in environmental technologies that is likely to "grow substantially," he says. In a few months, OSTP hopes to have produced a "national environmental technology strategy," Schaefer says.

Fusion's Hopes Hang on White House Review

With the Department of Energy's (DOE's) fusion research program facing a budgetary crisis, the White House is launching a major review to identify what should be saved and what scrapped.

A big reason for the review is that Congress is putting on the heat. One vocal critic, Senator Bennett Johnston (D–LA), has argued that the White House should cancel or commit to the two big fusion projects now on the drawing board: The $500-million Tokamak Plasma Experiment and the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor, an $8-billion to $10-billion multinational effort.

Fusion advocates are hoping a positive technical review may help save the big-ticket projects. Last week, DOE undersecretary Charles Curtis told the department's fusion advisory panel that he expects the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy to ask the president's Committee of Advisers on Science and Technology to evaluate fusion research and offer recommendations by next June.

Canadian Schools: Draft Misconduct Rules or Lose Funds

The Canadian government has issued an ultimatum to its research universities: Develop guidelines for handling alleged cases of scientific misconduct by 30 June or else risk losing federal research grants.

The announcement last week from Canada's three granting agencies* comes in the wake of an investigation into the shooting deaths of four faculty members at Montreal's Concordia University in August, 1992. The assailant, former professor Valery Fabrikant, had alleged that several colleagues had engaged in inappropriate consulting work and other conflicts of interest. Last June, a panel chaired by former York University President Harry Arthurs found merit in some of Fabrikant's complaints (*Science*, 17 June, p. 1662).

But this was not an isolated situation, the Arthurs panel said in its report: The problems at Concordia—such as increased competition among researchers for a smaller pool of funds—pervaded "the entire Canadian research community." This atmosphere, the granting agencies said, prompted them to demand guidelines for handling misconduct allegations.

About half of Canadian universities have misconduct policies, says Claude Lajeunesse, president of the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada. But he and others contend that rules are not enough to prevent misconduct. Says Peter Morand, president of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC): "The most important thing is to nurture a culture of integrity in the community."

*NSERC, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and the Medical Research Council.

Walker in, But Is Science Out?

Representative Robert Walker (R–PA), a staunch basic-research advocate, will chair a reconstituted House committee that oversees science and technology programs. The job is Walker's consolation prize after losing the race for House majority whip.

Less certain is what the Science, Space, and Technology Committee will be called when Republicans take control of Congress on 4 January. Representative Dave Dreier (R–CA), who is in charge of a restructuring plan, said on 2 December that the panel would be renamed the Technology and Competitiveness Committee, but Walker and his staff oppose the new nomenclature.

NIH to Study "Germ-line" Therapy

Despite a reputation for working at the cutting edge, gene therapists have one clear limit: They are barred from manipulating egg and sperm cells. Such tinkering would allow altered genes to pass from one generation to the next. But this verboten area of research is about to get a fresh look: The National Institutes of Health's Recombinant DNA Advisory Committee (RAC) plans to create a panel that will study genetically altering human fetuses and germ-line cells.

At a RAC meeting last week, Food and Drug Administration (FDA) molecular biologist Amy Patterson urged the panel to study fetal gene therapy. She says it's only a matter of time before physicians will want to try gene therapy in utero to treat childhood diseases.

The RAC agreed and decided last week to establish a RAC working group to study fetal gene therapy. The "germ-line question" will be one of the more important issues for the panel, says RAC member Robertson Parkman of Children's Hospital in Los Angeles. Parkman points to recent experiments showing that when DNA from a retrovirus is inserted into fetal lambs, their offspring inherit the retroviral DNA—a clear sign that the foreign genes had entered the sheep germline.