

Chimp Finally Shows AIDS Symptoms

Another AIDS truism is heading for the trashbin: the belief that no animal other than humans develops AIDS from HIV infection.

According to two well-connected AIDS researchers, a chimpanzee at Atlanta's Yerkes Regional Primate Research Center that was first infected with HIV in 1986 has become seriously ill with symptomatic AIDS. Although it's unclear what impact if any this will have on attempts by AIDS researchers to use chimps to understand and prevent the disease, the finding may alter how people view existing data from HIV-infected chimps.

As first reported in the 9 October *U.S. News and World Report*, a chimp named Jerome has developed acute diarrhea and critically low levels of CD4 cells, the key immune system warriors that steadily decline in HIV-infected people. A spokesperson says Yerkes researchers decline to discuss Jerome until they present their data in a scientific forum.

The news is no surprise to the University of Alabama, Birmingham's, Patricia Fultz, who works with HIV in chimps and who first infected Jerome 9 years ago when she was at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Fultz co-wrote a paper in the March 1991 *Journal of Infectious Disease* that described how HIV was unraveling Jerome's immune system, predicting that he would succumb to AIDS.

Now that her prediction appears correct, Fultz believes the finding "will add weight" to the studies that have tested HIV vaccines in chimps. Yet she cautions that the 9-year lag between infection and disease suggests the chimp model still has serious drawbacks. "I don't think it will make any difference at all on vaccine development," she concludes. For similar reasons, she doubts that chimps can illuminate human HIV pathogenesis.

Still, as Fultz acknowledges, those truisms could change, too, if a strain of HIV is found that

causes disease in chimps more quickly. Fultz and other scientists are searching for such strains.

Summit Aims to Save Ukrainian Science

Hoping to rescue his fellow scientists from calamity, a prominent Ukrainian cell biologist has organized an international summit next month to propose reforms in Ukraine's science establishment.

Ukrainian scientists are growing desperate. The National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (UNAS), which pays the bills for Ukraine's 150-odd research institutes, since April has received almost none of the \$54 million budget the government has promised. Yet there is a "frightening apathy within the academy," writes summit organizer Yuri Gleba in a 17 September letter to invitees. Most Ukrainian researchers agree that the UNAS "cannot continue in its present form, but... no proposals for change or calls for reforms have been forthcoming," says Gleba, head of the International Institute of Cell Biology in Kiev and a senior researcher at American Cyanamid in Princeton, New Jersey.

Gleba hopes to jump-start reform in talks between Ukrainian science leaders and about a dozen Westerners—including Sherwood Rowland, foreign secretary of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, and British pharmacologist



STEVEN DICKMAN

Help wanted. Scientists are seeking advice on budget crisis at Ukraine's National Academy of Sciences.

Sir Arnold Burgen, former president of Academia Europaea. The meeting, set for 6 to 7 November, may influence a new Special Commission on Science of the Ukrainian government. Gleba, a commission member himself, warns that "without some external pressure," the bureaucratic panel may do little to avert the crisis.

At least one Ukrainian scientist believes Gleba's summit—sponsored by the Soros Foundation and endorsed by the UNAS—is on the right track. "I totally support his approach," says biophysicist Oleg Krishtal, who will attend the meeting. How to reform Ukrainian science, he says, "is a question of the historical future of Ukraine."

Newt's Science Breakfast Club?

Now that Congress has abolished its science think tank, House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-GA) may be looking for a way to create a new one. The Office of Technology Assessment (OTA), a policy analysis shop, officially went out of business on 1 October, but it's already missed.

Gingrich is thinking about inviting some of his colleagues to a breakfast later this fall to talk science, says an aide to Representative Amo Houghton (R-NY). The purpose, the aide says, would be "to discuss what the House should do in place of" the OTA. Former OTA Director Roger Herdman said last month that Houghton, an OTA champion, had spoken with him about the meeting, but that the agenda "is up to the Speaker."

According to an OTA source, Herdman recently asked senior staffers to suggest policy experts to speak at what apparently could become a series of breakfast meetings. Not a bad idea, the ex-staffer says—except that Herdman indicated Gingrich would likely nix some obvious choices and would favor conservative themes. Says one OTA staffer, "It would make a great tombstone: OTA, 1972–1995, replaced by the Science Breakfast Club. No liberals need apply."

Agencies Envision Unified Grant System

Navigating the federal bureaucracy to win research grants is no easy matter. But now a small band of bureaucrats say they want to help. Officials from the three armed services, the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Department of Energy, the National Institutes of Health, and other agencies are quietly putting together a plan to simplify the way universities conduct business with the federal government.

The goal, says one NSF manager, is to create an electronic database that would allow universities to make proposals to any federal research office using a common set of rules. Such inter-agency coordination could be a boon to university researchers and accountants overwhelmed by the paperwork required to handle grants from different sources, as it would lead to a single accounting system for all federally funded extramural research, he says.

The automated system would also have a spin-off benefit for investigators: If a proposal didn't meet the mission of the agency to which it was submitted, it could be routed to one pursuing that line of research, says Helmut Hellwig, director of the Air Force Office of Scientific Research: "Right now, there is no formal interagency coordination to do this." Gerald Iafrate, director of the Army Research Office, adds that referrals today depend on personal relationships among research directors. Backers say the system could also save time and money by resulting in more joint projects, thereby eliminating duplication of research.

Proponents of the idea will meet in November to work out details of their plan, which then must win approval from agency chiefs. For now, they want to keep a low profile, lest they get caught up in the unwieldy bureaucracy that typically orchestrates such interagency initiatives. "If it gets political, it will fall apart," says one.