that come with a permanent position, are unparalleled. Also, being exposed to a new network of scientific colleagues contributes to building a strong foundation for a career in science. A postdoctoral fellowship can often be the prelude to a permanent position, particularly if the fellowship is at a government or industrial laboratory. Postdoctoral fellowships can enable new Ph.D.'s seeking a faculty position to get a head start on grant preparation. Stipends often approach or are comparable to those of entry-level positions at the host facility. Few, if any, economic hardships are imposed by accepting most postdoctoral fellowships. As far as being destructive of family life, that is a matter of perspective. A professional position tenured at the same location or with the same company for a working lifetime is exceedingly rare, even for employees.

If Manheimer's arguments against postdoctoral positions are accepted, what are the realistic alternatives? Employers are, at least, conservative when hiring and, in many cases, not prepared to make long-term commitments to staffing research programs in the current economic environment.

Manheimer does not take into account the negative impact of eliminating postdoctoral positions on the scientific infrastructure of the United States. The influx of new scientific ideas and the cross-fertilization among research groups at university, government, and industrial labs promoted by hosting postdoctoral fellows is essential to scientific progress and cultivates productive relationships within the scientific community.

While I would agree that it is possible to exploit postdoctoral fellows, I believe that wholesale elimination of the position would not benefit anyone, least of all new Ph.D. scientists. Other checks and balances should be in place to provide postdoctoral associates with meaningful research experiences and access to the many opportunities provided by these appointments.

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Gene Therapy: False Expectations?

As a former member of the Recombinant DNA Advisory Committee (RAC) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) (1992–1995), I was interested to read the News & Comment article (15 Dec., p. 1751), appropriately titled, "Less hype, more biology needed for gene therapy." Shortly before my departure from the RAC, I sent a letter to the NIH and the Chairman of the RAC stating exactly the same message. Unnecessary hype after each RAC session trumpeted the number of protocols approved. However, the end product—the results and consequences of gene therapy experiments—received scant notice, if any. I expressed my fear that the public was being misled. Too many false expectations are being raised in the minds of the public.

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Letters to the Editor

Letters may be submitted by e-mail (at science_letters@aaas.org), fax (202-289-7562), or regular mail (*Science*, 1333 H Street, NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA). Letters are not routinely acknowledged. Full addresses, signatures, and daytime phone numbers should be included. Letters should be brief (300 words or less) and may be edited for reasons of clarity or space. Letter writers are not consulted before publication.