LETTERS

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Curious minds

If experts can't decide on the merits of a medical procedure, how is an ordinary citizen to do so? How many transistors can dance on the head of a chip? Is too much sun bad for coffee? Can great poetry be "cloned"? (Left, Dolly, the muse.) Do mutant *Drosophila* fruit flies provide a good "model" of the sexual behavior of *Homo sapiens* males? And didn't two Italians discover "swollen atoms"?

Forty-Something Breast Screening

I write to comment on a statement in the sidebar "How one radiologist turns up the heat" (News & Comment, 21 Feb., p. 1057) of the article "The breast-screening brawl" by Gary Taubes, in which I am quoted as attributing Daniel Kopans's harsh criticisms of my epidemiologist colleagues at the University of California, San Francisco, to "frustration on [Kopans's] part." I trust that readers understand that no one but Kopans himself would have reasonable insight into what motivates his actions.

In addition, the entire sidebar portrays Kopans as a lone extremist who is anathema to me and to the many others who agree with his endorsement of mammography screening for women in their forties. Quite the contrary, despite his occasional excesses, Kopans has won the support of screening proponents for his tireless advocacy of the benefits of screening and for his numerous, scientifically valid peer-reviewed articles on the subject. It is unfortunate that Kopans is singled out, when the statements of any of several strident screening opponents could also have been criticized.

The recent National Cancer Institute Consensus Conference failed because the only consensus it produced asked each individual forty-something woman to decide for herself whether she should undergo mammography screening. How is a woman (or her primary health care provider, for that matter) to decide on the merits of screening when the "expert" panel could not decide? We need clear, concise statements that promote action rather than indecision.

Edward A. Sickles
Department of Radiology,
University of California,
San Francisco, CA 94143–1667, USA

Predictive Value of *Drosophila*

The *Drosophila fruitless (fru)* mutant analysis of Lisa Ryner *et al. (1)* discussed by Wade Roush (Research News, 13 Dec., p. 1836) is an important contribution to our understanding of the largely unknown genetic basis for insect behavior. But the evolutionary implications put forth by Ryner *et al.* detract from the value of the work. The discussion of vertebrate, and especially human male, sexual behavior in light of *Drosophila* behavior is problematic. Ryner *et al.* recognize that sex determination is different in *Drosophila* and in mammals. But they also suggest that *Drosophila* sex determination has predictive value for mammals: They seem to imply that the demonstration of *Drosophila* genetic control of courtship behavior would support a homologous genetic component in mammalian courtship and mating. This suggestion rests on one of two assumptions: Either courtship behavior can occur in only one way regardless of what the organisms are, or the most recent common hypothetical ancestor of *Drosophila* and Mammalia had courtship and the same mechanism of determining courtship. There is insufficient evidence to support the former, and the last common ancestor of *Drosophila* and Mammalia was likely a marine invertebrate with external fertilization without courtship behavior (*2*). This hypothetical ancestor would also have to be shown to have demonstrated sexual preference and mate choice.

Ryner *et al. (1)* show that male mutant *fru* flies are unable to differentiate between male and female flies, unlike wild-type males. This observation does not support their interpretation (*1*, p. 1086) that

> sexual orientation in flies is controlled by the same hierarchy of genes that controls all other aspects of sex.