

LETTERS



Choices

A National Research Council spokesman defends the selection of a principal investigator for a study of brucellosis in Yellowstone bison. Editors of the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* (left) express their views about the journal's recent privatization. A journalist questions that journal's new copyright policy. Researchers discuss whether any "new" classes of antibiotics have been developed in the last few decades. And the field of "environmental economics" is explored.

Bison Study Principal Investigator

Andrew Lawler states in his News & Comment article of 20 June (p. 1786) that Norman Cheville, one of the two principal investigators selected by the National Research Council for its study of brucellosis in the Yellowstone area, "is a longtime employee of USDA, which has threatened to decertify the safety of Montana beef because the wandering Yellowstone bison herds are infected with brucellosis." Cheville is not now an employee of the U.S. Department of Agriculture; he is at Iowa State University in Ames, as Lawler states, and carries impeccable credentials. Moreover, when he did work for USDA, he did not work for the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, the regulatory agency involved in the brucellosis eradication efforts and in the Yellowstone controversy. He worked in various capacities (including research leader for brucellosis) for the National Animal Disease Center, part of the Agricultural Research Service.

Lawler goes on to cite criticism of Cheville's objectivity by D. J. Schubert, "a wild-life biologist who works for a public interest law firm in Washington, D.C." Schubert's role and that of his employer are not mentioned. Schubert's employer, Meyer & Glitzenstein, is the law firm that has brought two lawsuits based on the Federal Advisory Committee Act against the National Academy of Sciences and the National Research Council.

All study participants, whether involved in a committee process or as a principal investigator, are subject to scrutiny for bias and conflict of interest according to the procedures of the National Research Council.

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Privatization of a Journal

I would like to expand on Andrew Lawler's article "Privatized cancer journal triggers Senate reaction" (News & Comment, 6 June, p. 1492). The arrangement between the National Cancer Institute (NCI) and Oxford University Press (OUP-USA) is a Cooperative Research and Development Agreement, a mechanism previously used for the development of various technologies. A major part of the project will be the research and development of a versatile electronic version of the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* (JNCI) that will be linked to other cancer information resources. In this age, in which the rapid communication of information is critical to scientific advancement, improvements in information dissemination can be as important for the public health as the development of new diagnostics.

Thus, the NCI:OUP-USA agreement is analogous: government expertise in producing the journal is being researched and developed by OUP-USA to produce an expanded knowledge base that will be made available to the scientific community and the public at a low cost. Subscription prices for the printed journal remain low—the best value for money by far of any journal in the cancer field—and subscribers can now access an enhanced full-text version on the World Wide Web. In addition, contents and searchable abstracts are available to the public on the journal's home page. Profits, if any, will be shared and reinvested in the dissemination of cancer information.

The arrangement provides for a transition during which OUP-USA will assume

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