to prohibit other types of data transfer as necessary. Some researchers are concerned that draconian privacy rules could interfere with the flow of research data. But the Administration promises to provide "safe harbors" for "beneficial uses" of genetic data, "including for important biomedical research efforts."

This package of not-fully-defined ideas was put together on short notice, according to congressional staffers. "It all happened on Tuesday night [8 July]," says a Senate aide, "when the White House called saying, 'We want you to look at this bill and introduce it on Monday [14 July].' " It did not get introduced in the Senate. Instead, Administration staffers now say they plan to cooperate with members of Congress to improve existing or pending legislation—such as a proposal originally introduced in 1995 by Representative Louise Slaughter (D–NY). It has been reintroduced in the House as HR 306 and has won 135 co-sponsors. Senator Olympia Snowe (R–ME) introduced a companion bill in the Senate and may do so again. In a minor coup for the Administration, two Senate Republican leaders—James Jeffords (R–VT), chair of the Labor and Human Resources Committee, and William Frist (R–TN), chair of the Subcommittee on Public Health and Safety—said they support the president's goals and will include them in legislation.

However, one ambitious, genetic privacy bill that proposed to put extensive controls on the collection and use of genetic data—introduced by Senator Pete Domenici (R–NM)—has been quietly pulled back for an overhaul. Biotech outfits and basic researchers alike protested its broad reach, says a Domenici staffer. As a result, the "snags" are now being removed.

A key problem that surfaced in the Domenici bill—and one that may haunt the Administration proposal as well—is the question of what is meant by the term "genetic information." It has not been spelled out as yet, but if the proposed legislation adopts a very broad definition, Congress may soon find itself debating big changes in the way medical records are handled. A Frist staffer predicts that hearings on protecting genetic data will begin in the Senate this fall.

–Eliot Marshall

MALARIA RESEARCH

Global Initiative Takes Shape Slowly

THE HAGUE—Leaders of the world's wealthiest biomedical and financial aid organizations met here last week to discuss how they might pay for a new assault on malaria, a disease that kills more than 2 million people a year. The meeting followed the lead of a gathering of scientists, held last January in Dakar, Senegal, which called for a cooperative effort to aid scientists and build up research networks in Africa. The U.S. participants were eager to create a "common pot" of funds, as National Institutes of Health (NIH) director Harold Varmus said last winter (*Science*, 17 January, p. 299). Varmus was also interested in joint peer review.

Both ideas received a cool reception at The Hague. The meeting-goers made no funding decisions, continuing this Multilateral Initiative on Malaria (MIM) strictly as a planning effort. Representatives of major organizations departed with promises to "improve communication and coordination," as a communiqué stated. While the participants made no firm commitments, many were, at least, encouraged by the involvement of big-league development agencies—including the World Bank—which are seeking ways to engage industry in the battle against malaria.

Varmus had pushed initially for quicker action, asking agencies to "take risks ... on interagency funding" of research through schemes that would be "not permanent, but experimental." He also suggested "coordinated peer review of subsets of the research enterprise." In support, meeting co-organizer Barend Mons of the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research noted that "we research managers are lagging 10 years behind the scientists." He said, "We need to work to share resources like the scientists do." However, Robert Howells of the Wellcome Trust countered these suggestions, pointing out that "collaboration and cooperation are a reality at the level of the investigator" already, because "over 80% of Wellcome Trust–supported investigators also receive funding from other agencies."

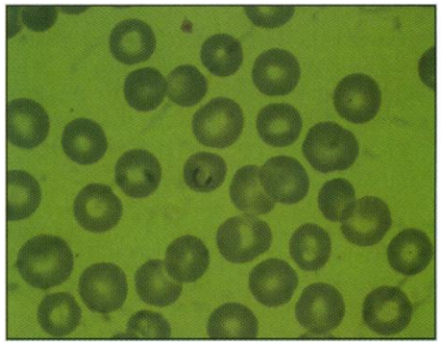
Shared peer review also met resistance on the grounds that it would be too cumbersome. George Radda of the U.K. Medical Research Council and Mark de Bruycker of the European Commission raised both legal and practical difficulties. Some scientists also argued against such moves: Bruno Gryseels, director of the Prince Leopold Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp, Belgium, felt that "momentum would suffer" if agencies agreed to "installing another administrative, secretariat, or triage level without any increase of funds."

Organizers of the Dakar meeting last winter had encouraged African researchers to send letters of interest describing ideas deserving support. Although NIH officials had hoped to review and take joint action on the letters this summer, that now seems unlikely. Tore Godal of the World Health Organization has agreed to coordinate a response to the applicants, and the communiqué says that the letters will be used to develop workshops on projects focused on individual proposals. A planning group will continue to explore mechanisms of collaboration.

Researchers said they were heartened to see major pharmaceutical company officials at the meeting, although industry has invested relatively little in antimalarial vaccines or drugs. According to Jerry Sadoff of Merck & Co. in Whitehouse Station, New Jersey, however, companies are still waiting to be convinced that new products can be made efficiently and that there would be "a guaranteed marketplace" for them.

Ok Pannenborg of the World Bank and David Namarro of the U.K. Department of International Development said that their agencies may be prepared to become involved at two levels to help win over industry: in upstream subsidies for drug development and in lending money to buyers specifically to purchase new products at reduced prices. But overcoming industry skepticism will continue to be a challenge.

For now, MIM will operate as "a loose confederation," says John LaMontagne of NIH's National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. Before leaving The Hague, participants made some new pledges. The U.S. National Library of Medicine's Elliot Siegel, along with other aid agencies, volunteered to develop a strategy for Internet connectivity for major African institutes. The Malaria Foundation of New York offered to develop a public relations strategy. Pannenborg committed the World Bank to undertaking a macroeconomic and marketing analysis for new antimalarial products. And all agreed to meet again under the auspices of the Wellcome Trust—probably in the United Kingdom 6 months hence—to continue these discussions.



CNRI/PHOTOTAKE/PNI

Prime target. Malaria parasite *Plasmodium falciparum* is the focus of vaccine and drug research.

–Richard Gallagher

With additional reporting by Eliot Marshall.