and win their Nobel Prizes, but the work was done by others." He also argues that the biggest effort, deserving the lion's share of credit, is not the molecular biology but "finding the families, chasing after them, interviewing them—this is very labor intensive."

Gordis himself has had to weigh these interests in negotiating the release of data from the massive Collaborative Study on the Genetics of Alcoholism. COGA, which has been funded by NIAAA at a cost of $57 million since 1989, has collected material on 4100 individuals affected by alcohol dependence, and it is about to publish its first major findings. The principal investigator of the multicenter effort, Henri Begleiter of the State University of New York in Brooklyn, says one publication, to appear later this year, will debunk claims of linkage between alcoholism and the gene for the D_2 receptor, and others will identify several "hot spots" on chromosomes that COGA researchers have linked to alcoholism. Now, NIAAA wants to make COGA's materials more widely available.

After a year of negotiating, NIAAA and the COGA investigators agreed last year that all the materials supporting this work will be released to the world in September 1999, roughly a decade after COGA was launched. Meanwhile, Gordis says, COGA is entertaining and approving requests for material on a case-by-case basis. "It's a situation where everybody is right," says Gordis, and he thinks COGA has made a reasonable compromise.

"Molecular biologists would like to get their hands on all this stuff and win their Nobel Prizes, but the work was done by others."

—Enoch Gordis

That deliberate pace has advantages that go beyond fairness, clinical researchers add. Those working with families with autistic children, for example, worry that forcing data to be released may erode quality. Geneticist Gerard Schellenberger of the University of Washington, Seattle, points to a widespread concern that the rush to collect families could lead to duplication of data sets. If investigators conduct their gene hunts in groups of families that are not truly independent, this could undermine the value of the statistical results. In addition, Schellenberger worries about moving too fast and prematurely "freezing" the diagnostic criteria used to select individuals for analysis. It is important, he thinks, to permit flexibility so that different theories can be fully tested.

But advocates of pooling family data have answers for such concerns. "This isn't a magic act," says CAN's Shestack: "All you have to do is keep good records" that place a unique identifier on each sample. He also thinks it should be possible for any investigator to sort the data according to any particular interest—once the raw materials have been characterized and made available.

In the end, the affected families seem likely to prevail in this discussion, and the NIH institutes and the researchers they fund will no doubt find a way to adjust. For as Shestack none too subtly points out, the subjects in autism research outnumber the investigators by 60,000 to one.

–Eliot Marshall

ITALY

Crisis Over, 5-Year Plan Back on Track

VENICE—Italian space scientists emerged from 5 days of torment last week as a government crisis put an eagerly awaited 5-year plan for the Italian Space Agency (ASI)—including a big boost for space science—in jeopardy. The center-left coalition government of Romano Prodi had been teetering on the edge of collapse after members of the Communist Refoundation Party walked out. Italy's 1998 budget—of which the ASI plan is a part—would have been shelved if the government had fallen. But on 14 October, the Communists returned, and 2 days later the government won a vote of confidence from Parliament. The budget and ASI's plans are now back on track.

The 1998 to 2002 plan represents another step in the rehabilitation of an agency that has been dogged by problems since its establishment in 1988. Weak management and poor policy-making led successive governments to place the agency under the guidance of special commissioners. But since the appointment of Sergio De Julio as ASI president a year ago, it has been getting back on its feet. The new plan, which will be officially presented to the government's financial planning committee on 31 October, includes a budget request of $3.8 billion for the 5 years. Funding for 1997 was $0.62 billion.

ASI's scientific director, Giovanni Bignami, points out that the three most important programs in the new plan are space science, the international space station, and Earth observation, each of which takes up about one-fifth of the budget. Space science received a significant boost over the minimal funding of previous years. "For the first time in the history of ASI, science is the biggest budget line," says Bignami. This boost has won the approval of Italian researchers, including Antonio Ruberti, European Union research commissioner and former Italian research minister.

Tough choices. ASI President Sergio De Julio.

The remainder of the budget will support three smaller programs: telecommunications, technology development, and a new launcher. A key component of the technology program will be a new series of low-cost, small national satellites, to be launched at the rate of about five per year. The new launcher, to be developed by Italy in collaboration with other countries, will be designed to loft small satellites up to a weight of 1 ton on a commercial basis.

While ASI aims to bolster researchers and industry at home, "we remain staunch supporters of European Space Agency [ESA] programs," says Bignami. ASI will also continue to pursue a number of international programs: Italy is already in the process of building a logistics module for the space station, while more long-term plans include participation in various NASA-led missions to Mars and the moon, and collaboration with Russia on the Spektrum series of scientific satellites.

The plan also reshapes the structure of ASI into four divisions—scientific, technology and applications, strategic, and administrative—echoing the directorate structure of ESA. Bignami says the new structure should solve some of the agency's management problems. In the past, he says, members of the scientific and technical committees also took on executive responsibilities. The new structure separates top management from the committees.

Despite the enthusiasm for the new plan, some researchers are skeptical that the requested budget will cover all the new initiatives. Although Italy is Europe's third largest spender on space, ASI's budget is still about half the amount Germany spends on space, and one-third of the French. "Having only one-twentieth of NASA's budget, we had to come up with some choices," De Julio told *Science*, "concentrating on things we know we can do well."

–Susan Biggin

Susan Biggin is a science writer in Venice.