



BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH

Help Wanted: Departure of Top Officials Adds to Vacancies at NIH

Two savvy biomedical leaders announced in the past few days that they are leaving the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to take jobs in the nonprofit academic world. Steven Hyman, director of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), will become provost at Harvard University in December, serving directly under President Lawrence Summers. And Alan Leshner, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), will become executive officer of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the publisher of *Science* (see sidebar). The twin departures are a setback for an Administration already under fire for delays in filling scientific posts, and they have raised concerns among scientists about a growing leadership vacuum at NIH, which has been without a permanent director for 22 months.

The timing of the announcements was coincidental, but coming after the abrupt resignation last month of Richard Klausner as director of the National Cancer Institute (*Science*, 14 September, p. 1967), it looked like an exodus. And the depletion of the top ranks at neuroscience and mental health institutes is especially acute: In addition to the departure of Hyman and Leshner, Enoch Gordis, head of the National Institute on Al-

cohol Abuse and Alcoholism, announced last summer that he will retire in December after 15 years as director, and the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke continues a year-old search for a director, following

Bruce Alberts, a molecular biologist and president of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) in Washington, D.C., last week acknowledged his own disquiet about vacant positions at NIH and other science agencies. Ever since Harold Varmus left NIH in December 1999 to head the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City, the government's largest research agency has been run by an acting director, Ruth Kirschstein. She is the longest-tenured acting chief on record at NIH (see table). "We all agree that the NIH needs strong, scientifically

PERMANENT DIRECTORS OF NIH

	Began term	Ended term	Continuity gap (months)
James A. Shannon	1 August 1955	31 August 1968	0
Robert Q. Marston	1 September 1968	21 January 1973	0
Robert S. Stone	29 May 1973	31 January 1975	4
Donald S. Frederickson	1 July 1975	30 June 1981	5
James B. Wyngaarden	29 April 1982	31 July 1989	10
Bernadine Healy	9 April 1991	30 June 1993	20
Harold E. Varmus	23 November 1993	31 December 1999	5
(Ruth Kirschstein, acting)	1 January 2000	—	22

the departure of Gerald Fischbach in 2000 to become health sciences vice president at Columbia University in New York City. In addition, the just-inaugurated National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering is without a permanent chief; the hunt for a director has only just begun.

sophisticated leadership," Alberts wrote in an e-mail, "if only because [a permanent director] will be needed to keep great institute directors in place and replace those who leave."

Robert Rich, executive associate dean of medicine at Emory University in Atlanta and president of the Federation of American Soci-

Leshner Named to Lead AAAS

A Maryland psychologist and neuroscientist will become the next head of the world's largest general science society. Last week the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS, publisher of *Science*) announced that Alan Leshner, currently head of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) in Bethesda, Maryland, will become its new chief executive officer. Leshner, 57, will succeed Richard Nicholson, 63, who is retiring on 3 December.

During Nicholson's 12-year tenure, AAAS solidified its finances, built state-of-the-art headquarters in downtown Washington, D.C., and entered the Internet age, putting *Science* and other information services online. The organization now has nearly 140,000 members, 400 staff, and an \$80 million budget.

Leshner hopes to build on that growth but isn't ready to discuss specifics. "AAAS is in terrific shape,

and that provides an incredible opportunity to expand its leadership role in American science," he told *Science*. Leshner led NIDA for 7 years, during which he became known as a national spokesperson on drug abuse prevention and treatment.

After earning a doctorate in physiological psychology at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, in 1969, Leshner spent 10 years at Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. His research focused on the biological bases of behavior, and he wrote a textbook on the link between hormones and behavior. In 1979 he became a staffer at the National Science Foundation and a decade later moved to the National Institutes of Health. In 1998 he was elected a member of the National Academies' Institute of Medicine.

"He's a perfect choice [for AAAS]," says Alan Kraut, director of the American Psychological Society in Washington, D.C. "He's very excited about putting science front and center in national policy debates."

—DAVID MALAKOFF



Scientist-advocate.
Alan Leshner.

CREDIT: [SOURCE] U.S. CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION