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I believe further research will show that *spin off* was invented not by newsmen but by NASA officials wishing to avoid the unpleasant connotations of the word *fallout*.

Blast off seems to have been carried over into science (fact) writing from science (fiction) writing, rather than having been invented *de novo* by newsmen. Whether *blast off* is "spurious," as McNeill suggests, is a matter of opinion; it is as precise in meaning as the engineer-approved word *liftoff* and a good deal more descriptive.

WILLIAM HINES

Washington Star,
Washington, D.C. 20003

Cowardly Patient

I wish to thank Preston J. Burnham for his proposed informed-consent form (Letters, 22 April). It is indeed heartwarming to learn that at least one member of the medical profession is capable of complete honesty and candor.

The matter is of personal interest to me because my doctor has insisted that I undergo the hernia operation Burnham outlined so eloquently. As explained to me, the prospect is not completely unthinkable, although terms like *incision*, *suture*, and others are obviously only synonyms for *hack*, *saw*, and *chop*. He has even been so devotious as to recommend a surgeon who has many (perhaps thousands of) successful operations to his credit, at the same time avoiding mention of the untold numbers who must surely have succumbed to the "possible complications" Burnham listed.

The latter must be aware though, that his proposed form will meet with some resistance from the more reactionary elements of the medical fraternity. When I showed it to one of my neighbors (who is said to be a competent surgeon but whom I know to be a lousy golfer), he broke up in uproarious laughter. Obviously, this sort of person will obstruct general acceptance of the proposal.

I am confident that if devout cowards like myself would sign the consent form seriously, we could not only halt medical progress but perhaps even set it back significantly.

R. L. ADDINALL

Research and Development Department,
Steel Company of Canada,
Hamilton, Ontario

Information Exchange Group No. 5

Several information exchange groups (IEG) have been created by the National Institutes of Health as a means of facilitating scientific communication in certain specialized fields. In essence, each provides a selected list of participants with preprints of articles as well as with recent comments or memoranda written by members. Information disseminated in this manner may be cited in formal bibliographies as a "personal communication" but not treated as published work.

At the annual meeting of the American Association of Immunologists in Atlantic City in April, there was considerable discussion of the merits of IEG No. 5, Immunopathology. Though it was agreed that the IEG represented an important experiment in the area of rapid and effective dissemination of the results of scientific research, a number of disadvantages were noted:

1) IEG communications are sent only to a limited number of members of the scientific community. The implied selection, which might be permissible for the private dissemination of preprints, was considered improper in an operation conducted by a governmental agency.

2) While the IEG clearly accelerates communication, it does not add to it, since the preprints are read by the same scientists who will later read the published articles.

3) While the preprints are not intended to serve as a substitute for formal publications, they do so in effect, since complete manuscripts are reproduced. The contention that they are "not published work" is meaningless since they are, to an increasing degree, quoted in formal bibliographies. Attempts by a single journal, such as the Journal of Immunology, to restrict such quotation are likely to be ineffectual. There was unanimous agreement that each memorandum should be clearly marked with the warning that it does not constitute a formal publication and may not be cited.

4) Since the preprints are complete publications, there is a real danger that they will reduce the usefulness of existing journals in the field of Immunology and may ultimately supersede them.

5) No refereeing process is provided for what is, in essence, a form of publication.

6) The IEG places undue emphasis on priority. It is thus abused by many

authors who prepublish most or all of their papers in this form, apparently solely for this purpose. A recent memorandum encouraging use of the IEG specifically to assure priority was very unfortunate.

7) When manuscripts already accepted for publication are preprinted by IEG, there is an infringement of copyright. In general, the IEG preprint violates the requirement of most journals that manuscripts submitted to them have not been submitted elsewhere.

8) One of the principal objects of the IEG has not been achieved, insofar as little or no free discussion has taken place in its pages, judging by IEG No. 5.

9) A publication program of the magnitude of the IEG requires the expenditure of large sums of money. At a time when funds available for research are limited, the diversion of considerable amounts for this purpose is difficult to justify.

As a result of the discussion, in which the above points were raised, a resolution was passed by a vote of 56 in favor to 39 against that IEG No. 5 publication should not be continued.

SHELDON DRAY

*American Association of
Immunologists, 9650 Wisconsin Avenue,
Bethesda, Maryland 20014*

For a Cleaner Lake Tahoe

As the attempt to reduce water pollution in the vicinity of Lake Tahoe progresses, Abelson predicts that the use of fertilizers may be banned (Editorial, 20 May, p. 1015). If one were to take all the fertilizers used in the entire area and dump them directly into Lake Tahoe, it would not change the measurable concentration, provided that uniform distribution could be accomplished. Only 2000 tons of nitrogen are used in an entire year in the whole state of Nevada. Even this amount of nitrogen would scarcely change the concentration in Lake Tahoe sufficiently to measure by any means, including a biological one. Banning the use of fertilizers on garden plots seems very extreme, but organic pollutants feeding constantly into lakes and streams in increasing quantities are another matter.

WILLARD H. GARMAN

*National Plant Food Institute,
1700 K Street, NW,
Washington, D.C. 20006*

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