

Committee and a reviewer of Merck's application. Held says that in general he "doesn't see that we will be able to import chimps in sizable numbers." Asked if Merck could import from some country other than Sierra Leone he observes that "I think their options are quite limited. I think they are going to have problems."

Merck and the Interagency Primate Steering Committee have widely differing expectations about the availability of chimpanzees. Hilleman says he will need about 80 new chimpanzees a year once his hepatitis B vaccine gets into production. He envisages setting up a very large breeding colony to meet the needs of the vaccine program—"Some day one might need up to 1000 breeders." Domestic production of chim-

panzees by the half-dozen breeding colonies in the United States amounts to a total of 75 animals a year—insufficient to meet Merck's needs even if Merck were to be given first use of them. The scant likelihood of being able to import new animals for breeding stock is one reason why it will be "impractical" to raise the national production, notes a recent report of the Interagency Primate Steering Committee.

#### Ethics of Chimp Treatment

Besides the question of availability, another aspect of using chimpanzees for medical research is that they should perhaps be treated somewhat differently from laboratory rats. Recent studies have shown not only that they have an elaborate social structure but also that

they can master and communicate in American sign language and other symbolic systems. Primatologist Jane Goodall does not infer from that that chimpanzees should never be used for research, but she does believe there is an obligation to treat them well. "There are occasions when it is justified to use chimps, but what upsets me is the conditions in which they are kept. They should be kept very well but in fact they get lousy treatment. They are kept in small cages with nothing to do, and they are usually put in solitary confinement when they get older. Yet these are creatures which we now know can communicate in sign language—that seems very wrong to me."

Yerkes primatologist Duane Rumbaugh, the educator of chimpanzee

## Briefing

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### A New Career for Norman Cousins

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Independent thinker Norman Cousins has resigned the editorship of the *Saturday Review*—for the second and probably last time—to become a university lecturer on health and medicine. He will be spending time both at Columbia University and at the UCLA School of Medicine.

Cousins has given considerable thought to matters of medicine—and the placebo response in particular—ever since 1964, when he successfully cured himself of a bizarre degenerative disease (ankylosing spondylitis) with a combination of laughter, vitamin C, and an understanding physician. He did not write about his adventure until 1976, when his account was published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. He has since received thousands of supportive letters from doctors which caused him to realize that his notions about the importance of people mobilizing their innate self-healing powers were not as far out as he had imagined.

At UCLA, Cousins will be participating in a new program on medical ethics and philosophies set up by Bernard Tower, a British pediatrician and writer, and philosopher-lawyer William Winslade. Cousins is being given free rein. Among topics he hopes to explore is the perception of physicians in literature and philosophy—"Most of the great books have doctors

wandering through them in one form or another, and perceptions of them are very different." He is also "fascinated by the connection between creativity and longevity," citing as an example the late cellist Pablo Casals. Are there, Cousins wonders, "biological concomitants to creativity and the will to live?"

A decade ago, the idea of having Norman Cousins coach medical students would have gone over like a lead balloon. But times have changed; doctors need all the help they can get. Says UCLA's associate medical school dean Fred Rasmussen, "We're delighted."

### Congress Reluctant to Seek Other Worlds

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A House appropriations subcommittee has delivered what one NASA scientist calls a "sad rebuff" to the agency's plans to begin its search for extraterrestrial intelligence, or SETI.

On 4 May the committee voted to delete \$1.4 million from the \$2 million requested for rigging telescopes at Jet Propulsion Laboratory and at Goldstone, California, to listen for nonrandom signals from our galaxy. The prospects for having the money restored by the Senate are not too good either. The chairman of the Senate appropriations subcommittee is William Proxmire (D-Wis.), who in February awarded SETI the feared Gold-

en Fleece award for ostensibly dumb federal spending.

If SETI plans collapse, it will be a small but sharp example of scientists' failures when it comes to imbuing legislators with their own enthusiasm. Support for the project is remarkably widespread among astronomers as well as other scientists who consider the investment tiny in view of the potential gains.

The budget request asked for a total of \$14 million over 7 years for the first stage of the project. Although Proxmire thought this was something that could be postponed for "a few million light years," astronomers warn that the microwave "window"—the band of frequencies judged most promising for listening—will become increasingly clouded by radio interference from other earthly sources.

Richard Henry, the SETI program manager at NASA, says the folks there are "very disappointed" and "puzzled" by the House action. Although a Soviet-American venture proposed 7 years ago (called CETI, the C being for communication) never amounted to anything, Henry says that recent developments in large-scale integrated circuits and the availability of million-channel analyzers mean that "a meaningful search is now possible." Henry says the search is worth it even if nothing is found because then we will know "our galaxy is a very lonely place" and adjust our philosophies of life accordingly.

A NASA report on SETI, issued last March, reflects a positively romantic attitude toward the project. "Dare we be-

Lana, says there is "no doubt that we need to upgrade the treatment of chimps and other apes as a result of what we have recently learned about them. The emerging picture is that chimps are a very unique type of animal and the consequences of how they are treated are not just the same as those of the way one treats a laboratory rat."

"All you can do is say what is more important, these chimps or humans?" Maurice Hilleman observes. Endemic in many parts of the world, hepatitis B occurs in low incidence in the United States but is nevertheless on the increase. There has been a steady growth from 1500 reported cases in 1966 to 15,000 a decade later. The increase is partly ascribable to more accurate diagnosis but is otherwise unexplained. A cu-

rious set of population groups seems particularly at risk—patients receiving blood transfusions, staff and patients of hemodialysis units, drug users, and people who have themselves tattooed. Other high-risk groups are male homosexuals and those in institutions for the mentally retarded.

The virus of hepatitis B is found in most body fluids, from milk to blood, sweat, and tears. Transmission through infected blood products is clearly one route of infection in the United States but cannot account for the endemic nature of the disease in most underdeveloped countries. Transmission by "intimate contact" is one route that has been studied by epidemiologists, but often with conflicting results. Often the spouses of patients with hepatitis B, but

no other close family member, contracts the disease. On the other hand, according to a recent review by Arie J. Zuckerman, similar frequencies of hepatitis B surface antigen were found in registered prostitutes in Athens and in a matched group of pregnant women. A comparison of nuns and prostitutes in Colombia yielded the same result.

"That doesn't mean that the nuns are bad, only that there is a high incidence of hepatitis B marker in Colombia," notes Harold A. Conn of Yale University. A large-scale survey conducted in New York turned up a significant excess of hepatitis B antigen among male, but not female, homosexuals, though for reasons that are still obscure. "It must be borne in mind," Conn has written, "that people who sleep together may do other

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gin?" says the introduction. "For us who write here that question has step by step become instead: Dare we delay?" Many members of the general public appear to share NASA's enthusiasm. But it seems the stodgy lawmakers do not.

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### Holistic Health Concepts Gaining Momentum

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A few years ago it would have been unthinkable for the federal government to lend its sponsorship to a conference on health that featured such topics as faith healing, iridology, acupressure, Buddhist meditation, and electromedicine.

But public disillusionment with the limitations and high cost of conventional medicine, combined with consumerism and the human potential movement, has produced a virtual explosion of interest in alternative healing methods and systems, all of which go under the name of holistic health.

Thus Washington, D.C., in April was the setting of a 4-day conference, co-sponsored by four government agencies, on "Holistic Health: A Public Policy." Arranged by the East-West Academy of Healing Arts, San Francisco, the meeting promised entertainment at the very least, with workshops conducted by such varied personalities as Oh Shinnah, an American Indian who specializes in getting people in touch with the energies of

Mother Earth; Jack Schwarz, who lets researchers stick needles through his arms to study how he controls pain and bleeding; the President's charismatic sister Ruth Carter Stapleton, and psychic healer Olga Worrall.

The conference also featured practical attempts to formulate recommendations on health manpower education and training, services, research, and health insurance.

Holistic health is a vague concept that is often construed as relating to meditation, massage, and other things that do not have anything to do with doctors, pills, and scalpels. But East-West Academy's director Effie Poy Yew Chow emphasizes that the concept embraces all health-promoting practices including allopathic medicine (what we mostly have now). And although some of the matters seemed a little far-out, the fundamental principles are not. One principle is that mind and body are inseparable and that the focus should be on the person rather than just the disease. Another is that the patient is the healer—that the patient has the responsibility and power to become and remain well, and the healer acts only as teacher and facilitator. Holistic health also embraces what is called humanistic medicine in that it recognizes anew that the relationship between doctor and patient can be at least as important as the intervention. Central to holistic health is the idea of disease prevention and promotion of "wellness" through nutrition and healthful life-styles.

Holistic health is really a new package

for a lot of ancient concepts and healing methods that have been elbowed aside by high-technology medicine. Now the federal government, frantic for ways to provide comprehensive care and avoid spiraling costs, has opened its mind to some of these concepts. And cost is not the only factor. As Lowell Levin of Yale Medical School noted at the conference, the disease profile of the country is no longer very well matched by available services. The system is geared for acute medical problems, but the ratio of acute to chronic ailments has almost reversed since 1900, owing to public health measures and antibacterial agents, as well as the growth in the elderly population. Now 80 percent of Americans' health problems are chronic in nature.

Some Administration officials reportedly opposed federal participation in the conference on the grounds that it might be construed as an endorsement of scientifically unproved techniques. But George Lythcott, head of the Health Services Administration (HSA) and the highest ranking official present, made it clear he didn't think he had to believe in all the methods to endorse the principles. He said his top two priorities were promotion of holistic concepts and improved care for the aged, and he hoped that "one can ride in on the coattails of the other."

Other government cosponsors in addition to HSA were the Health Resources Administration, the National Institute of Mental Health, and the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Constance Holden