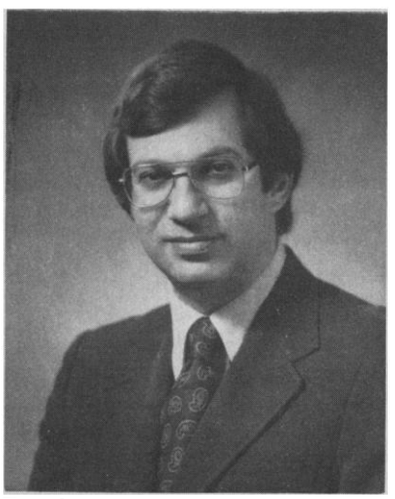
Cancer Institute Passes First Test in Senate

The National Cancer Institute came through its first round of congressional scrutiny under the new Administration with few if any bruises, but it will face a much tougher examination next month. Senator Paula Hawkins (R–Fla.) had originally called for a hearing to find out why cancer has not yet been cured. But when the session of the subcommittee on oversight and investigations was held 21 May, chairman Hawkins never did ask that question. Instead, the hearing seemed to serve more than anything else as a primer for the freshman senator with NCI director Vincent DeVita and members of the National Cancer Advisory Board reviewing how the NCI functions.

Hawkins had also said in the past that she would investigate the problem of possible fraud and abuse at the cancer institute; that matter is now to be addressed by the full committee on labor and human resources 2 June. The upcoming hearing will culminate a 3-month investigation into NCI contracting procedures by the committee, which is headed by Orrin Hatch (R–Utah). A staff aide said that the hearing will reveal "a number of serious and substantial abuses" in NCI funding, although "no specific incidences of fraud were found." DeVita has said that he knows of no current cases of abuse and that problems with contracting have been largely remedied in recent years. The committee staff has asked for so many documents from NCI that DeVita wrote a memo to the cancer board, saying that he was worried about the ability of the institute to function because his staff was so burdened. A Hatch aide said that the committee has gone out of its way to accommodate the institute during its investigation.

Meanwhile, Hawkins focused much of her hearing on the problem of transferring up-to-date information on cancer treatment to local physicians. Doctors from community hospitals and smaller medical centers expressed frustration that knowledge of current clinical practice advocated by NCI may take as long as 2 years to filter down to the local doctor. But just how the process could be speeded up was not discussed in any great detail. Harold Amos, National Cancer Advisory Board member and chairman of Harvard's microbiology department, disagreed with what he said was a public assumption that technology transfer was the responsibility of NCI. "This view should and must be challenged



Tougher test yet to come

NCI director Vincent DeVita

as a threat to divert the NCI from the one thing it was created to do . . . namely, conduct and develop programs in research. In that role its resources are already taxed." The transfer of knowledge "must be the task of some other network already in place." DeVita noted that although the problem is difficult, NCI has three programs in place to educate community doctors in current cancer therapies—including the network of comprehensive cancer centers around the country.

Edward Kennedy (D–Mass.), a member of the subcommittee, inquired about the status of Laetrile and DeVita cited the NCI study recently completed which showed the apricot pit derivative to be ineffective. Hawkins then noted, "I know of a person who had skin cancer, who was diagnosed as a terminal case. The person took Laetrile and she's alive 2 years later."

Henry Pitot, cancer advisory board member and director of the cancer center at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, replied quietly, but firmly, "Individual cases don't make a generality."—***Marjorie Sun***

Kean *v.* AAAS Settled Out of Court

Early this year, Benjamin Kean, physician to the late Shah of Iran, filed a libel action against the AAAS for publication of articles in *Science* (18 January and 29 August 1980) about the circumstances surrounding the Shah's admission to the United States for emergency medical treatment. Kean demanded $4 million in damages.

According to terms of the settlement agreement filed in federal court, publication of an editorial note in last week's *Science* brought the matter to a close. The note, which is limited in scope, in no way constitutes a retraction of the main points of the story, which *Science* continues to stand behind. AAAS paid no money damages to Kean who will bear his own legal costs.—***Barbara J. Culliton***

Cambridge Biologists Pursued by Money

The promise of genetic engineering continues to attract large sums of money to the field and its practitioners. Massachusetts General Hospital has just announced a $50-million grant from Hoechst, the German chemical company, to fund a new department of genetic engineering. Other new ventures are starting up at Harvard and at MIT.

The Hoechst grant, $5 million a year for 10 years, will enable Mass General to build a department of 100 people. It will be headed by Howard Goodman, a biologist at the University of California, San Francisco.

The reason for the arrangement is that both Hoechst and Mass General wanted to set up genetic engineering groups, and both had fixed on Goodman as their man. The hospital will own the patents on anything the new department invents, but will grant exclusive rights to Hoechst.

Hospital authorities believe that the terms of the agreement ensure full academic freedom for their researchers. "Our investigators will choose their own research projects, are open to collaboration with others, will write

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