

## 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 generalization." —**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

their own scientific articles, select the journals for publication and meetings for presentation, and decide when to submit articles to journals," hospital director Charles Sanders said last week.

The appointment of Goodman is part of a joint plan by Mass General and the Harvard Medical School to upgrade their capability in genetic engineering. Harvard Medical School recently hired Philip Leder away from NIH to head its department of genetics. John Potts, who chaired Mass General's search committee, notes as Goodman's scientific achievements his collaboration with Cohen and Boyer on some of the original papers establishing the recombinant DNA technique, and his work on the control of gene expression by hormones.

Another new gene splicing enterprise in Cambridge is the Genetics Institute which, despite its name, is a commercial company. The two principal scientific advisers to the company, who also serve on its board of directors, are Mark Ptashne and Tom Maniatis of Harvard University. Last year Harvard approached Ptashne with the idea of setting up a gene splicing company in which the university would take equity, but dropped the plan after protests from the faculty. The other backers went ahead without Harvard, and the Genetics Institute was founded in December 1980. Capitalized at more than \$5 million, the company's board of directors includes William Paley of CBS and Benno Schmidt of J. H. Whitney.

Meanwhile at Massachusetts Institute of Technology another kind of project has been under consideration for several months, that of a joint institution to be set up by its biology department and by the Whitehead Foundation of New York. The foundation, set up by Edwin Whitehead after sale of his medical instrumentation company to Revlon, supports basic research. It hopes to set up an institution for research in developmental biology, at which members of MIT's biology department would hold joint appointments. The foundation is said to want MIT biologist David Baltimore to be director, and to be prepared to invest \$100 million in an endowment fund for the institution. MIT has not yet decided whether to accept the offer.

—Nicholas Wade

## False Alerts and Faulty Computers

An early-warning computer system buried deep inside a hollowed-out mountain in Colorado is unreliable and inadequate because of poor design and management, congressional investigators charged at a recent House hearing. In response, a Pentagon communications official said a change was under way: the early-warning center will no longer have to use computers of the World Wide Military Command and Control System (known as Wimex), a controversial multibillion-dollar system that has come under repeated attack for poor reliability.

The early-warning system at the underground headquarters of the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) was the source of a series of false alerts in 1979 and 1980 that received widespread media attention (*Science*, 14 March 1980, p. 1183). The computers falsely reported that Soviet missile attacks were under way, and, during a 1979 alert, jet interceptors took off and the launch control centers for the 1000 or so Minuteman missiles scattered across the American heartlands went on a low-level nuclear alert. After each false alert, the Pentagon asserted that the problems had been fixed. In one case the Pentagon reported that an alert had been touched off by the accidental running of a computerized war game; in another, a silicon chip had broken down.

In a strongly worded statement before a House government operations subcommittee on 26 May, however, acting U.S. Comptroller General Milton J. Socolar said the problems stem from a decision by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1970 to use the same type of computers in all elements of the Pentagon's Wimex computer system. NORAD should have been exempt, he said, because of its critical mission and because the Wimex computers were obsolete for this purpose. The Government Accounting Office, which Socolar heads, has repeatedly made this charge for almost 3 years.

The main GAO criticism is that Wimex software is so cumbersome that extremely complex programs must be written to ensure that NORAD can do

real-time computing. Of late, development of this software at NORAD has cost \$3 million a year.

The following day, on 27 May, Pentagon officials denied that the computers were to blame, but at the same time said that NORAD in the future will be exempt from having to use Wimex equipment. Lieutenant General Hillman Dickinson, head of communications programs for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said this change will be a minimal one, as Wimex computers make up only 5 of the 87 computers currently used by NORAD.

NORAD officials had complained about the Wimex equipment all the way back to 1970, and the Joint Chiefs had ignored their pleas. Whether or not the change would really take place was therefore the subject of a heated exchange between Pentagon officials and chairman of the subcommittee, Representative Jack Brooks (D-Texas). Brooks claimed that the commander in chief of NORAD, who testified on the previous day, knew nothing about being exempted from the Wimex computer program. Dickenson replied that the Joint Chiefs had made the decision on 9 January, but that bureaucratic channels had kept the message from being clearly heard out in Colorado.

—William J. Broad

## Protests Help Argentinian Physicist

A judge in Buenos Aires has dismissed all the charges against physicist Jose Westerkamp and five other civil rights activists. The defendants, members of the Center for Legal and Social Studies, an Argentinian human rights group, were arrested in February, held incommunicado for a week, and subsequently accused of having sketches of military installations. Their arrest sparked off a flurry of protests from the American scientific community (*Science*, 20 March 1981, p. 1327).

In communications with human rights groups in Washington, Westerkamp has credited the protests from the United States and Europe as being a critical factor in securing his release while the charges were investigated, and in finally getting the charges dismissed.—Colin Norman