Hospital Faulted for Dry Eye Study

An investigation by the National Institutes of Health has concluded that a clinical study conducted at a Harvard hospital deviated from federal regulations regarding the protection of human subjects, primarily because the hospital's system for reviewing human experiments was slipshod. The study involved an experimental vitamin A treatment for "dry eye" syndrome.

During its investigation, NIH discovered that the panel responsible for overseeing human studies failed to adequately review protocols and communicate its findings to investigators. NIH also confirmed that the Harvard researchers deviated from their approved study design by increasing the number of patients, changing dosages, and altering the treatment regimen. No government funds were spent on the flawed research.

The study on the vitamin A-enriched eye ointment was carried out by a pair of ophthalmologists at the Harvard-affiliated Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary in Boston. The research became particularly controversial because the two investigators owned stock in the company that hoped to market the ointment, Spectra Pharmaceutical Services of Hanover, Massachusetts. The study has been the subject of at least nine separate investigations, including an ongoing one by a congressional subcommittee interested in scientific fraud and misconduct (*Science*, 16 December, p. 1497).

Last week, the National Eye Institute at NIH stated that it would be willing to resume support for unrelated grants awarded to the two ophthalmologists—Kenneth Kenyon at Harvard and Scheffer Tseng at the University of Miami—if their universities assure NIH that the two are qualified to serve as principal investigators. NIH had earlier yanked its support for Tseng and Kenyon, pending the investigations.

At the Mass Eye and Ear Infirmary, officials are busy beefing up their review process for human experiments, which NIH found severely lacking. The NIH is insisting that the infirmary re-review all 50 of its current human studies, and that the hospital accrue no new subjects for federally supported research until NIH is satisfied that the hospital has dealt with its deficiencies.

NIH also is demanding that Mass Eye and Ear notify all the patients who participated in the vitamin A study and determine what harm, if any, they suffered during the clinical trial. Officials at the eye infirmary say they are "most uncomfortable" with the demand to notify the former subjects of Tseng's study for fear of "unnecessarily alarming patients," and perhaps more to the point, "opening a legal Pandora's box," says Joseph Goodman of Mass Eye and Ear.

Tseng and Kenyon maintain that the study was "low risk" and that no patients were harmed by the vitamin A-enriched jelly that was smeared on their eyeballs. But the NIH report says "One cannot state with certainty that harm or injury to subjects did not occur through participation in this study without a human subject audit and follow-up contact with the subjects." So the trials and tribulations are not over yet.

The Food and Drug Administration and the University of Miami are still working on their own investigations. Johns Hopkins University, where early vitamin A studies were run by Tseng without approval from either the FDA or the human study panel at Johns Hopkins, is sifting through the rubble and will issue its own report in the coming weeks. And a group of angry stockholders have filed a class-action lawsuit against Tseng and others, charging that they withheld data that suggested that vitamin A was not very effective for treating most types of dry eye. Tseng denies the charge.

■ WILLIAM BOOTH

NIH Probes Researcher's Fundraising

A scientist at the National Cancer Institute (NCI) is under investigation at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for contracting with a direct-mail "sweepstakes" fundraising operation in connection with a private foundation he set up.

Robert I. Glazer is a leukemia researcher who last year won a $500,000, 5-year grant from Bristol-Meyers for his work investigating tumor resistance to chemotherapy. According to NIH officials, he was advised that the money should be administered through the NIH's Foundation for Advanced Education in the Sciences, which is how outside grants are customarily handled.

However, Glazer decided last spring to set up his own foundation to receive the money, all of which is intended for his own research use at NCI. He was told that his foundation required NIH approval for an "outside activity." He submitted an outside activity request last fall.

Soon afterwards, according to his lawyer, David I. Shapiro, Glazer got an even better idea. He contracted with a fund-raising firm, Watson and Hughey of Alexandria, Virginia (from an ad placed by the firm in *Science)* to raise funds for the foundation from the general public. The money was to support leukemia research projects by other scientists in private institutions.

NIH did not get wind of this arrangement until mid-January, when CBS called. "60 Minutes" was preparing a feature on Watson and Hughey, which has several small cancer charities as clients. According to Paul Van Nevel of the NCI, CBS called the Journal of the NCI, which was about to publish an article about the company, to ask if Glazer had any connections with the cancer institute.

It seems Watson and Hughey is the subject of consumer fraud suits in four states and is under investigation by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service. The company sends out direct-mail appeals for funds in which it informs respondents they are winners in a $5000 sweepstakes which can be claimed by sending in a contribution. The $5000 is actually the whole pot—most awards are for $0.10. Glazer signed such an appeal for his foundation.

At a 19 January meeting, says Shapiro, NIH officials informed Glazer that his foundation had not been approved. He was also told to write to all the donors and return their money, although this is still reportedly under discussion. Shapiro says about $100,000 has been received by Watson and Hughey, which operates a separate escrow account from which it deducts its expenses.

Shapiro says NIH has still not informed his client just what policy he is supposed to have violated. He says NCI associate director Elliott Stonehill told Glazer last 4 October that he would recommend NIH approval of Glazer's outside activity request. Hearing nothing further, he assumed there was no problem. Stonehill says this account is "not correct," but would make no further comment.

Glazer wanted to arrange a stipend for administering the grant himself, which his lawyer calls "a great bargain" because it was cheaper than having it administered through NIH. Shapiro also says Glazer hoped to have the foundation to support his research after his retirement from the government.

In any case, Glazer, a "very productive researcher" according to his division director Bruce Chabner, never applied for permission to do fund-raising. NIH officials say that it is out of line for a cancer researcher to raise funds from the general public for cancer research, but there is no explicit policy regarding this because no one has ever proposed such a thing.

■ CONSTANCE HOLDEN