

Medicine 4 months to decide that the paper reporting the results needed revisions, and another month to reach a decision on the resubmitted paper. The whole process took nearly 8 months from time of submission until the *Journal* finally gave its nod—and only then did the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke hold a news conference and send out a clinical alert to acquaint doctors with what everyone agreed were important findings that should change clinical practice. But *Journal* editor-in-chief Arnold S. Relman said Bracken's case was unusual, noting that the *Journal* accepted a consensus statement on the use of corticosteroids in treating AIDS patients with *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia in just 4 days. However, the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), which sponsored the consensus conference, then took more than a month to put out news of the results (*Science*, 30 November 1990, p. 1196).

NIAID director Anthony S. Fauci said federal agencies want approval from medical journals before publicizing an important finding because the journal's review provides an independent check that the conclusions are justified by the data. Researchers, however, have another incentive to wait for publication: editorial policies that forbid prior publicity for a paper before it has been published. But Relman said that authors are wrong to worry about that. He said it is the *Journal's* policy not to interfere with the dissemination of important public health information. Once a paper is accepted, he said, authors are free to discuss it with whomever they wish, so long as they don't refer to their work as about to appear in *The New England Journal of Medicine*. That, Relman said, is permitted only after the final, fully corrected version goes to the printer about 3 weeks before publication. But that still left researchers at the meeting wondering how the *Journal* will treat early release of the results of papers that have not been accepted, or even submitted. In answer, Relman pointed out that both the breast cancer and AZT studies were made public long before they were submitted to the *Journal*.

Though last week's meeting came to no conclusions, the discussion could lead to an NIH-wide policy for handling early release of clinical trial results. John H. Ferguson, director of the office of medical application of research, which sponsored the meeting, says there is a great deal of interest at NIH to come up with such a policy, and individual institutes have already begun to formulate their own procedures. With so many AIDS trials under way, and pressure to get effective therapies rapidly into use, some guidelines are clearly needed. ■ JOSEPH PALCA

Hard Times for San Diego Museum

A funding crisis has hit the San Diego Museum of Natural History, one of the oldest scientific institutions west of the Mississippi, and, as a result, science is being sacrificed to make way for large public exhibitions. Founded in 1874, the museum has been the repository for about 8.5 million rock, fossil, and biological specimens from the southwestern United States, and it has sustained a strong scientific staff with its modest annual budget of \$2 million.

But in the last few years its financial situation has eroded, and the board of trustees decided in December to dismiss roughly 40% of the scientific staff. The exodus included two internationally respected researchers: Frederick Schram, curator of paleontology, known for his research on the evolution of crustaceans, and Amadeo Rea, Jr., curator of ornithology and mammalogy, an expert on endangered coastal bird species.

The last few years have been hard for many public institutions, and particularly tough for museums of natural history. The most conspicuous victim is the British Natural History Museum, which was thrown into turmoil early last year by plans to cut scientific staff and focus research on a few popular areas (*Science*, 11 May 1990, p. 677). What may be a new trend is spreading concern among biologists such as Harvard entomologist Edward O. Wilson, who last week warned the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology that it is posing a serious threat to systematic biology. He argues that many academic biology departments have turned a cold shoulder on research involving the evolution of large animal species, and that museums have become by default the most important supporters of this research.

One of the curators at the San Diego museum, speaking on background, agreed wholeheartedly with Wilson. He worries that the San Diego case may become a precedent for other institutions. "If we go under," he says, "it would reflect the failure of our society to recognize the importance of museums not just as repositories...but as a means of educating and informing the public about scientific research."

While the administration of the San Diego museum has trimmed the research budget, it is planning to increase expenditures on public exhibits. In January, it unveiled a new display called the Josephine Scripps Hall of Mineralogy, costing more than \$400,000—half of it financed with a grant from the National Science Foundation. The hall will require another infusion of cash—perhaps as much as \$110,000 according to one source—before it can be completed.

The museum's acting director, Allan Shaw, says the mineralogy hall is one of several projects that have been eating into the museum's financial reserves recently. After taking over in July, Shaw brought in some new accounting procedures and a change in perspective. "When the new comptroller and I got into the books," Shaw says, "we discovered that the revenue projections were not accurate." In fact, he found the museum was running a \$125,000 deficit in its 1989–1990 budget, which is expected to grow even larger this year. Shaw fired half a dozen non-scientific workers and five members of the scientific staff. The library funds were cut to \$6,000, eliminating nearly two-thirds of the journal subscriptions. According to some of the scientific staff, Shaw also put out the word that the museum would try to focus on "blockbuster exhibits" in the future, hoping to draw crowds and raise additional funds by charging admission. Furthermore, the staff has been told that the museum should focus on San Diego County. This prospect is discouraging, one staffer said, since the curators have focused in the past on species found throughout the Pacific region, and "organisms don't respect political boundaries."

After being hit with a spate of negative publicity during the holidays, the museum in January offered to rehire the scientists it had dismissed—but only for 2 months while undertaking an emergency plea for funds. Only one accepted. Says Schram, who is now working at the Scripps Institute of Oceanography as a marine biologist: "I had already packed away 20 years' worth of research and left the building."

In an attempt to rebuild the museum's scientific staff, some trustees have launched an emergency fund-raising campaign. Jackie Hollywood—trustee, wife of a San Diego judge, and an amateur ornithologist—is leading the appeal. She says the first objective is to restore the library's budget and get the science program back on its feet. Over the long term, she hopes the museum will attract a series of endowments, possibly targeted at specific areas such as ornithology, mammalogy, geology, and general science.

■ ELIOT MARSHALL