

## Briefings

edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

### Stanford Surgeon to Stay—After All

Stanford neurosurgeon Frances Conley, who resigned in May because of alleged sexism in her department (*Science*, 14 June, p. 1484), has decided to stay on. Conley planned to leave partly in response to the proposed promotion of Gerald Silverberg, whom she accused of sexism, to chairman of the neurosurgery department.

According to a 4 September statement by Stanford University Medical Center, Conley has found recent actions by the medical school administration "reassuring." The administration has appointed a faculty senate "committee on sexual harassment and gender insensitivity," as well as a hospital task force on discrimination. Another committee has been assigned to clarify procedures on reporting sexual harassment.

And that's not all. Medical school dean David Korn has just appointed a committee to look

into all of Conley's complaints; appointment of a new chairman for the neurosurgery department will await the committee's findings. Press reports have said Conley made a national search for a new chairman a condition of her return, but at a 5 September press conference, associate dean for faculty affairs Robert Cutler said her return had involved no specific conditions.

Conley, who has been at the medical school for 23 years, said that she was unhappy with Silverberg because, among other things, he called female colleagues "honey" and provided an example of "the sexist, arrogant behavior that other male neurosurgeons copy."

### Early Quake Warning

Scientists have been saying for years that, despite the rudimentary state of earthquake prediction, it is technologically feasible to construct an early warning system that could prevent a lot of damage to life and property. Now, in a report calling for a prototype "real-time earthquake monitoring system," the National Research Council

**New chief for women's health.** *Vivian W. Pinn, chairman of the pathology department at Howard University College of Medicine in Washington, D.C., has been chosen by NIH director Bernadine Healy as the first director of NIH's Office of Research on Women's Health. Pinn, a renal specialist and a former president of the National Medical Association, is the third woman and the first black woman to chair an academic pathology department in the United States. The new office is designed to enhance research on illnesses that particularly affect women and to see that women are adequately represented in clinical trials.*



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(NRC) has put some flesh on the idea.\*

Earthquake prediction currently ranges from longterm forecasts of probabilities to instruments that can pick up early seismic waves seconds before the most damaging part of a quake hits. The NRC panel, chaired by I. Selwyn Sacks of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, D.C., says the technology is ripe for something more—systems that

\*Copies of the report, "Real-Time Earthquake Monitoring," are available from the NRC, 2101 Constitution Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20418.

would automatically broadcast early warning signals, providing "tens of seconds" advance notice to areas more than 10 kilometers from the epicenter.

The panel recommends beginning by adding more capable instruments and enhanced processing to an existing California network—thus gaining data on which to base the upgrading of other systems. An enhanced system would give communities time to take measures such as slowing high-speed trains, shutting off pipelines, and turning off power plants. It would also include immediate post-quake information about magnitude and location.

The panel notes that in view of budgetary limitations, earthquake warnings could best be improved by upgrading existing infrastructures in earthquake-prone areas. It also warns that the growing number of smaller, special-purpose systems are going to find themselves incompatible with each other in the absence of comprehensive, coordinated regional systems.

### Russian AIDS Puzzle

Why is AIDS almost nonexistent in the Soviet Union? That's a question biologist and epidemiologist Andrei P. Kozlov has been asking for the past 5 years. He doesn't have any answers yet, but he thinks they may hold significant clues about how the disease spreads.

Kozlov, head of a new AIDS institute at the Bruce Rappaport Biomedical Center in Leningrad, has been directing a program that has screened about half of the city's 6 million residents for HIV. Since 1987, only 65 cases of infection have been found, 25 in foreign visitors.

But that picture presents a real puzzle, says Kozlov, who was in Bethesda, Maryland, last week for the annual meeting of National Cancer Institute researcher Robert C. Gallo's Laboratory of Tumor Cell Biology. If the virus originated in Africa, as most believe, it should have showed up in Leningrad, because there were more than 5000 African students there during the '60s and '70s.

So why didn't HIV infection explode? Kozlov's hypothesis is that the virus was present, but that "social containment factors" kept it from touch-



Leningrad, soon to be St. Petersburg again.

ing off an epidemic. He is now trying to identify those factors, and at the same time keep a close watch on viral incidence to see if and when the numbers start to take off.

"This is a stage America passed through a decade ago with nobody knowing it," says Kozlov. Will current political upheaval—and the inevitable increase in foreign visitors—break down the barriers that have thus far held the virus in check? "We'll see," says Kozlov.

### Slamming Natural Gas Into Petrol

Simplifying the process of converting methane—the main component of natural gas—into the larger hydrocarbons that make up gasoline could be a boon for the global supply of transportation fuels. Now two Alaskan researchers think they're on to a technique for