

Briefings

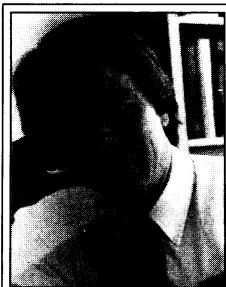
edited by CONSTANCE HOLDEN

Parting Blast From AIDS Official

The combative former director of the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) AIDS laboratory has ended a 20-year CDC career with some spirited parting shots at the government's AIDS effort.

Donald Francis, a pediatrician/epidemiologist who has been directing CDC's AIDS effort in California for the past 6 years, is well known in the AIDS community for his attacks on alleged government penuriousness and bureaucratic foot-dragging surrounding anti-AIDS efforts. But at his farewell speech on 31 January he outdid himself, attacking the Reagan and Bush Administrations for being "uninhibited by either knowledge, experience, or wisdom" when it comes to public health. Indeed, Francis is so frustrated that he's bailing out, at age 49, to be a private health consultant. "I'm leaving because you can't really accomplish enough to make it enjoyable, to make it feel as though you're really doing something," he told *Science*.

Francis told the standing-room-only crowd in an Atlanta hotel ballroom to be wary of "the political whims of extremists" who have repeatedly quashed attempts to slow the spread of the virus by haggling over acceptable language in official literature, promoting chastity rather than condoms, and enforcing an "illogical" drug abuse policy. "A society which allows narrow political vision to guide public health policy is doomed to succumb to disease," he warned. Nor did he spare the CDC, which, although "a great and necessary organization," he said, "needs to set a new tone for ideas...the cloistered caution of the past needs to be discarded."



Donald Francis

Catching a Virus on the Move



With a scanning force microscope—which traces out the topography of a sample in much the same way a stylus moves on a phonograph record—scientists at IBM have produced what they say is the first observation of a virus exiting a living cell. They were able to watch changes in the cell starting seconds after they introduced a strain of pox virus into cultured monkey kidney cells. Image on the left shows a microvillus, a fingerlike structure on the cell surface. After 8 hours the scientists saw protrusions that they believe were progeny viruses (pink spot at right) emerging from the cell. The observation was made by a team in Munich headed by Gerd Binnig, who won the Nobel Prize in physics in 1986 for co-inventing the scanning tunneling microscope.

Francis encouraged the CDC to support legislation to protect the organization from political influence, work more closely with local health clinics, step up voluntary programs to identify HIV-infected people, and demote officials who promote "political dogma over scientific truth." His colleagues gave him a standing ovation.

Creationism Compromise

Creationists in California have declared victory in the latest round with the state department of education (*Science*, 15 February 1991, p. 738). Last month, the San Diego-based Institute for Creation Research—a non-accredited graduate school that awards master's degrees in subjects such as astronomy and biology—reached an out-of-court settlement in a lawsuit over the state's licensing practices.

The institute filed suit against

California's education superintendent Bill Honig 2 years ago, claiming he had unfairly pressured two state review panels to recommend against renewal of its teaching license. The institute also requested an administrative review by the attorney general.

Last year the attorney general instead turned the whole matter over to a new state agency responsible for licensing unaccredited schools. The state thereupon decided that since it no longer had licensing jurisdiction, it was not worth it to contest the suit.

But the education department is making a number of concessions to get the case settled out of court. Besides paying the institute \$225,000, it has agreed to recommend the removal of the two negative reviews from the record, and to bar Honig—a staunch foe of creation science—from participating in licensing renewal decisions.

Foes of creationism believe the settlement sets a dangerous precedent. Eugenie Scott of the National Center for Science Education says they are particularly troubled by an "equal time"

statement in the settlement: that "a private postsecondary educational institution may teach the creation model as being correct provided that the institution also teaches evolution." Although private schools are free to teach creationism so long as it is not labeled "science," Scott fears teachers will feel encouraged to acknowledge creationism.

The institute will continue to operate under its old license until the new agency (the Council for Private Postsecondary and Vocational Education) issues a decision—which it doesn't have to do until 1995. In the interim, Scott warns, some graduates may be taking their master's degrees and heading off to become teachers in your children's science classrooms.

PCR Regulations

Following up on its promise to relax licensing restrictions on the use of the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) (*Science*, 31 January, p. 528), Hoffmann-La Roche last week released new regulations affecting academic and nonprofit laboratories using PCR to diagnose human disease.

The new agreement grants these labs the rights to perform tests for a wide variety of diseases and conditions, such as infectious and genetic diseases, genetic predisposition to diseases, tissue-transplant typing, and parentage determination. Under the old agreement some of these applications—including the use of PCR for HIV detection—were forbidden. The company will maintain its policy of charging no up-front licensing fees, and royalties will drop to as low as 9%. Royalty rates under the old agreement are "confidential, but they were higher than 9%," says company spokeswoman Paula Evangelista.

Licenses to use PCR for research, rather than commercial diagnostic purposes, cannot be obtained through Roche. The exclusive distributor for non-diagnostic applications is Perkin-Elmer Corp. in Norwalk, Connecticut.