



ARMED FORCES INST. OF PATHOLOGY

**Public enemy.** New research grants will target the protozoan *T. cruzi*, the cause of Chagas' disease.

## Grants Bolster Latin American Science

Biomedical research in Latin America got a generous boost this week from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, which has expanded its program of grants in the Western Hemisphere to include Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Venezuela.

This week, Hughes announced a total of \$15 million in 5-year grants to 47 scientists in six countries. Included are 27 labs in Latin America, where the awards will provide money for stipends, equipment, and supplies in budget-strapped nations hard pressed to maintain funding for science. In the first round, in 1991, Hughes awarded \$11 million to 24 labs in Mexico and Canada. Hughes reviewed proposals from more than 500 researchers selected from a list of candidates submitted by their institutions.

The bulk of the money will

fund research on genetics, basic cell biology, and parasites involved in diseases, such as *T. cruzi* (which causes Chagas' disease) and *E. coli*. "For me, it means a lot," says Ana Belen Elgoyhen of the Pharmacological Research Institute in Buenos Aires, who notes that many Latin American researchers get only salaries from their governments and rely on European and U.S. sources to support their research. Elgoyhen plans to use her \$400,000 grant to pay student stipends and other costs of her studies on nicotinic receptors involved in hearing. Sergio Ferreira, who studies protein folding at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, hopes to use most of his \$306,000 award to buy analytic instruments. "This is really important for helping to keep good scientists in developing countries," Ferreira says.

The awardees will share their findings at annual meetings, the first in January 1998.

## No Misconduct in 'Gay Gene' Study

Government investigators have apparently decided to close an inquiry into allegations of scientific misconduct in a controversial study of behavioral genetics—a study that linked gay

male behavior to genes in a region of the X chromosome. *Science* has learned that the Office of Research Integrity (ORI) at the Department of Health and Human Services ended the probe last December, in effect absolving its subject, Dean Hamer of the National Cancer Institute.

Neither Hamer nor ORI would comment on reports that ORI has closed its investigation. ORI director Chris Pascal explains that "normally, we don't even acknowledge that we have a case" unless a researcher has been found guilty. However, 2 years ago, the media reported that ORI was looking into Hamer's work after one of his colleagues alleged that results in one study were skewed by biased data selection—a charge that Hamer denied (*Science*, 30 June 1995, p. 1841). Hamer's attorney, Robert Charrow of the Washington, D.C., firm of Crowell & Moring, would not discuss ORI's decision but said: "I can say that Dean had a very good Christmas." Charrow also said the government has placed "no restrictions" on the topics Hamer may investigate.

While Hamer's studies of gay behavior appear to have been given a clean bill of health by ORI, they have not been independently replicated. At least two other research teams, one at

the National Institutes of Health and the other at the University of Western Ontario in Canada, have been collecting data in an attempt to replicate Hamer's work. But neither has published results.

## Ex-Surgeon Probes R&D Policy in Senate

When it comes to the government's role in science and technology, the doctor is in. That's the message from Senator William Frist (R-TN), a former cardiac surgeon and unofficial chair of the Senate's new Science and Technology Caucus.

Unlike the House, the Senate lacks a committee whose primary jurisdiction is science. As a result, science policy matters—including reauthorization bills—often fall through the cracks. But Frist could change that as the new chair of two subcommittees that oversee the major civilian R&D agencies, including the National Institutes of Health (*Science*, 17 January, p. 295), the National Science Foundation, and NASA. Those duties put him in a unique position to shape debate on the suddenly hot topic of increasing government support for science, and science lobbyists say top Republican leaders have encouraged him to take a prominent role.

Earlier this month, Frist chaired the caucus's first event: a 3-hour round table with 10 top executives from government, industry, and academia. Their advice to Frist and his fellow caucus members—Senators Pete Domenici (R-NM), Joseph Lieberman (D-CT), and Jay Rockefeller (D-WV)—was not new: provide stable funding to universities for research and training and for more partnerships with government and industry.

Frist says he hopes to hold hearings on some of these issues, but declined to discuss specific legislation or funding levels, noting that "it may come down to getting more out of what we're already doing."

## Satcher to Take Top Health Post?

David Satcher, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, is being courted for the country's highest public health position—assistant secretary for health at the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Phil Lee retired from the post last month. At the same time, HHS sources say, the agency is considering combining Lee's former policy role with the position of U.S. surgeon general. If Satcher were to accept the dual assignment, he would oversee the National Institutes of Health, the CDC, and the 6100 physicians who staff the U.S. Public Health Service.

Satcher, a physician and epidemiologist, came to CDC in 1993 from the deanship of Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee. In 4 years at the

CDC, he has boosted the profile of preventive medicine and pressing public health problems such as violence in inner cities. Mohammad Akhter, executive director of the American Public Health Association, credits Satcher for doing a "tremendous" job and "taking CDC's scientific base down to the community [level]." If Satcher were to accept the promotion, Akhter says, "I'm sure the public health community will applaud." As surgeon general, Satcher would be in a post that is sometimes viewed as a hot seat, as it was in 1994 when Joycelyn Elders resigned under pressure after making controversial remarks about legalizing drugs.

Satcher declined to comment through a spokesperson, and HHS says the agency has not yet reached a final decision about the positions.



Satcher