



BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH

Help Wanted: Departure of Top Officials Adds to Vacancies at NIH

Two savvy biomedical leaders announced in the past few days that they are leaving the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to take jobs in the nonprofit academic world. Steven Hyman, director of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), will become provost at Harvard University in December, serving directly under President Lawrence Summers. And Alan Leshner, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), will become executive officer of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the publisher of *Science* (see sidebar). The twin departures are a setback for an Administration already under fire for delays in filling scientific posts, and they have raised concerns among scientists about a growing leadership vacuum at NIH, which has been without a permanent director for 22 months.

The timing of the announcements was coincidental, but coming after the abrupt resignation last month of Richard Klausner as director of the National Cancer Institute (*Science*, 14 September, p. 1967), it looked like an exodus. And the depletion of the top ranks at neuroscience and mental health institutes is especially acute: In addition to the departure of Hyman and Leshner, Enoch Gordis, head of the National Institute on Al-

cohol Abuse and Alcoholism, announced last summer that he will retire in December after 15 years as director, and the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke continues a year-old search for a director, following

Bruce Alberts, a molecular biologist and president of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) in Washington, D.C., last week acknowledged his own disquiet about vacant positions at NIH and other science agencies. Ever since Harold Varmus left NIH in December 1999 to head the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York City, the government's largest research agency has been run by an acting director, Ruth Kirschstein. She is the longest-tenured acting chief on record at NIH (see table). "We all agree that the NIH needs strong, scientifically

PERMANENT DIRECTORS OF NIH

	Began term	Ended term	Continuity gap (months)
James A. Shannon	1 August 1955	31 August 1968	0
Robert Q. Marston	1 September 1968	21 January 1973	0
Robert S. Stone	29 May 1973	31 January 1975	4
Donald S. Frederickson	1 July 1975	30 June 1981	5
James B. Wyngaarden	29 April 1982	31 July 1989	10
Bernadine Healy	9 April 1991	30 June 1993	20
Harold E. Varmus	23 November 1993	31 December 1999	5
(Ruth Kirschstein, acting)	1 January 2000	—	22

the departure of Gerald Fischbach in 2000 to become health sciences vice president at Columbia University in New York City. In addition, the just-inaugurated National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering is without a permanent chief; the hunt for a director has only just begun.

sophisticated leadership," Alberts wrote in an e-mail, "if only because [a permanent director] will be needed to keep great institute directors in place and replace those who leave."

Robert Rich, executive associate dean of medicine at Emory University in Atlanta and president of the Federation of American Soci-

Leshner Named to Lead AAAS

A Maryland psychologist and neuroscientist will become the next head of the world's largest general science society. Last week the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS, publisher of *Science*) announced that Alan Leshner, currently head of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) in Bethesda, Maryland, will become its new chief executive officer. Leshner, 57, will succeed Richard Nicholson, 63, who is retiring on 3 December.

During Nicholson's 12-year tenure, AAAS solidified its finances, built state-of-the-art headquarters in downtown Washington, D.C., and entered the Internet age, putting *Science* and other information services online. The organization now has nearly 140,000 members, 400 staff, and an \$80 million budget.

Leshner hopes to build on that growth but isn't ready to discuss specifics. "AAAS is in terrific shape,

and that provides an incredible opportunity to expand its leadership role in American science," he told *Science*. Leshner led NIDA for 7 years, during which he became known as a national spokesperson on drug abuse prevention and treatment.

After earning a doctorate in physiological psychology at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey, in 1969, Leshner spent 10 years at Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. His research focused on the biological bases of behavior, and he wrote a textbook on the link between hormones and behavior. In 1979 he became a staffer at the National Science Foundation and a decade later moved to the National Institutes of Health. In 1998 he was elected a member of the National Academies' Institute of Medicine.

"He's a perfect choice [for AAAS]," says Alan Kraut, director of the American Psychological Society in Washington, D.C. "He's very excited about putting science front and center in national policy debates."

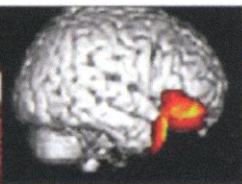
—DAVID MALAKOFF



Scientist-advocate.
Alan Leshner.

CREDIT: [SOURCE] U.S. CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

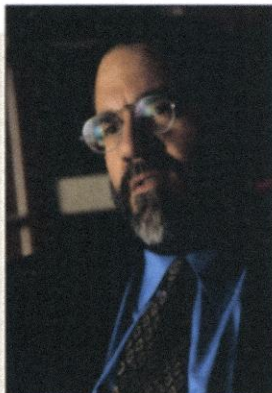
The commonality
of addictions



Farming
and
language

NIH INSTITUTE VACANCIES

Institute	Permanent director	Tenure ends
Alcohol Abuse	Enoch Gordis	December 2001
Biomedical Imaging	—	(new institute)
Cancer	Richard Klausner	September 2001
Drug Abuse	Alan Leshner	November 2001
Mental Health	Steven Hyman	December 2001
Neurology	Gerald Fischbach	December 2000
NIH	Harold Varmus	December 1999



To academe. NIMH's Hyman
to be Harvard provost.

eties for Experimental Biology (FASEB), agrees. It's difficult for any acting director to recruit subordinates, Rich says. "I believe it will be difficult to fill the institute directorships [at NIH] with permanent persons until the most senior position, the NIH director, is filled," he says. "The longer this goes on—with departures pending—the more urgent it will become" to find an NIH chief.

A group of prominent biologists made a plea for a new "permanent leader" at NIH to Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Tommy Thompson in a 5 October letter, according to Maxine Singer, president of the Carnegie Institution of Washington. The co-signers included, among others, Nobelist Paul Berg of Stanford University, genome scientist Eric Lander of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and Thomas Pollard of the Salk Institute for Biological Studies.

In private, many scientists are more outspoken. The head of a major research university, who asked not to be identified, said last week that he was "very concerned" about the NIH and its biggest component, the \$4 billion National Cancer Institute (NCI). Currently, NCI deputy director Alan Rabson, Kirschstein's husband, is serving as acting director. The White House is rumored to be recruiting a new NCI chief from Texas without input from NIH or the broader biomedical community (see ScienceScope, p. 973).

Earlier this year, according to Alberts, officials at the White House and HHS, of which NIH is part, consulted NAS about federal jobs. But the dialog has tapered off, he says. The terrorist attacks intervened, Alberts thinks, but he also believes the response to those attacks makes it clear that the Administration needs "better access to top scientists."

NIH acting director Kirschstein brushes

aside worries about the recruitment of new staff. The spate of recent NIH resignations arrived at the same time by "coincidence," she says, and they are part of the normal turnover of government staff. "I don't think anyone's unhappy with the decisions I've made," she adds, and she says she has the "full confidence" of HHS Secretary Thompson. As for the concern that she's being excluded from helping with the search for the next cancer chief, Kirschstein acknowledges that she hasn't discussed the search with Administration higher-ups. The appointment, she notes, is the president's prerogative.

Klausner and Hyman had once been widely viewed as possible internal candidates for the NIH directorship, as has Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. Fauci declined to comment on rumors that he is now the leading candidate.

—ELIOT MARSHALL

BIOTERRORISM

New Law May Force Labs To Screen Workers

Molecular biologist Julia Hilliard has spent the past 20 years studying deadly viruses, including the monkey-borne B virus that can destroy a person's brain. But if the Georgia State University academic wants to keep working with such potential bioweapons, she may soon need to prove that she's not crazy, a convict, or using illegal drugs.

Last week, President George W. Bush signed into law an antiterrorism measure that gives spy and police agencies broad new investigative powers. It also bars several classes of people—including felons, the mentally ill, and those from nations deemed "terrorist" by

the U.S. government—from possessing certain viruses, toxins, and microorganisms that could be used as weapons. Lawbreakers would face up to 10 years in jail. The new rules may force universities to conduct criminal background checks and drug tests on thousands of scientists and students who, like Hilliard, study the B virus, anthrax, and about 40 other deadly agents (see table, p. 973).

Many researchers say they welcome the added security if it keeps research materials from falling into the wrong hands. "It's overdue," says Hilliard. But some scientists worry that the recent anthrax attacks may cause Congress to take additional steps—including barring non-U.S. citizens from handling certain materials—that could hinder academic research.

It is unclear how many researchers will be affected by the new law. Up to 300 universities—and several dozen more state and federal government labs—currently handle material classified as "select agents" by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta, according to Ron Atlas of the University of Louisville in Kentucky. He predicts that it will have "minimal" impact because many facilities already screen workers doing classified work for the military or conducting federally funded drug studies. But other university labs, including Hilliard's 16-person Biosafety Level 4 facility in Atlanta, currently don't require such measures. "It is probably the weakest link in our [security] program," Hilliard says.

John Collier, who studies anthrax at Harvard University, says he "could live with" a background check, which security companies say can cost from \$20 to thousands of dollars per person. But he fears that having to screen every worker in his lab "could create a huge



Controlled substance. New law sets jail terms for illegal possession of biological agents like Marburg virus.

bureaucracy" without significantly improving security. Anthrax and other potential bioweapons can be cultured from natural sources, he and others note, and don't neces-