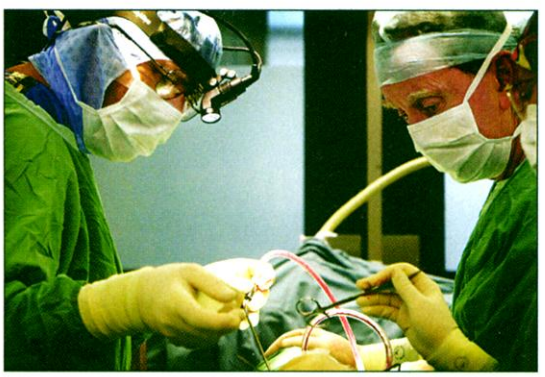
large group of faculty members are from other universities both at home and abroad. So we need a written document to guide and instruct our teachers and to prevent them from misconduct." **–DING YIMIN**

Ding Yimin writes for *China Features* in Beijing.

SCIENTIFIC MISCONDUCT

Australia Probes Kidney Researcher

SYDNEY—The Australian government has frozen funding to a prominent medical researcher and clinician pending the outcome of an investigation into allegations that he committed scientific misconduct. The case has raised questions about the adequacy of the country's present system of investigating misconduct.



Open inquiry. Bruce Hall (left) is under investigation by the University of New South Wales.

The allegations against Bruce Hall, a renal transplant physician and professor of medicine at the University of New South Wales (UNSW), have been made by three members of Hall's laboratory. In a series of submissions to university officials beginning last fall, they alleged that Hall misrepresented and fabricated experimental results, manipulated authorship credit in presentations and papers, and provided false data on a federal grant application. The work in question involves the role of CD4+ and CD25+ cells in organ acceptance and rejection as well as experiments involving monoclonal antibodies. Hall has declined to comment on any aspect of the case.

This month, in an attempt to put pressure on the university, the researchers—Clara He, Juchuan Chen, and Hong Ha—took their charges to ABC radio, which aired them last weekend. Two days after the ABC story ran, the UNSW Council, the institution's governing body, ordered an outside inquiry into the matter as well as an internal review of the university's procedures relating to possible misconduct. "The allegations are enormously disturbing," says council member Jeremy Davis, a former dean of the university's management school and past president of the academic board. "If the allegations are true, all our deep processes have failed."

Immediately after the show aired, John Ingleson, the university's deputy vice chancellor, issued a statement saying that the radio program "contained a number of serious inaccuracies." The statement also asserted that "the university has taken all appropriate steps to investigate the complaints referred to in the program." Ingleson said that its findings would be made public but did not give a timetable.

In a 16 January letter to UNSW officials, the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), the country's leading biomedical research funding agency, said that it was suspending a recently awarded grant to Hall—one of several he holds from the council—because of questions He had raised about the accuracy of the data upon which the application was based. "We don't have a view [on the truthfulness of the allegations]," says a council spokesperson. "But we take the matter very seriously, and we've asked that [the investigation] be done quickly."

Australia has no national body to monitor, investigate, and prosecute allegations of misconduct. Instead, each institution sets its own procedures, which must follow relevant state employment or anticorruption laws. To receive federal funding, institutions must agree to a code of conduct written by NHMRC and a nationwide body of university vice chancellors.

But that system may be inadequate for the task, says Merrilyn Walton, an ethics scholar at the University of Sydney and a former state commissioner for health care complaints. While making no judgment on the allegations against Hall, Walton says it's unrealistic to require institutions to root out serious scientific misconduct that could damage their reputations and their bottom lines. "It's like asking police to investigate police," she says.

–LEIGH DAYTON

Leigh Dayton writes from Sydney.

CHEMISTRY

To Net Big Molecules, Widen the Mesh

Some tradeoffs seem unavoidable. Industrial efforts to purify water or natural gas, for example, separate desired compounds from mixtures by passing them through membranes pocked with tiny holes. The smaller the holes, the more selectively the membrane lets molecules pass. But the tighter passage also slows the overall flow, requiring the use of higher pressures to push compounds

ScienceScope

Touching a Nerve Do investigators believe that grant size and duration have a big impact on their research? The National Science Foundation (NSF) is still tallying the answers to that and other questions put to some 6000 grantees as part of a study ordered by the White House budget office. But the 92% response rate to its Web-based questionnaire indicates how strongly researchers feel about the subject, officials say.

"I've never seen such a high response. It's amazing," says Norman Bradburn, a survey veteran who heads NSF's social and behavioral sciences directorate. NSF director Rita Colwell expects that the survey results, due out next month, will help her persuade Congress and the White House that larger, longer awards would make researchers more productive. "We hope it will reveal what more they could do with the right size and length of grants," Colwell told the National Science Board at its March meeting. The average NSF grant is now $113,000 and runs for 2.9 years.

One Beluga, Two Beluga Responding to critics, an international body has disclosed the data it relied on in allowing Caspian nations to resume fishing beluga. Pressure groups have argued that stocks of this sturgeon species, prized for its caviar, cannot sustain commercial harvest (*Science*, 22 March, p. 2191). But the secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) deems the beluga's status "far from precarious," claiming that there are an estimated 9 million individuals in the North Caspian alone (www.cites.org/eng/programme/Sturgeon/catch.pdf).

The 2002 allowed catch of 1780 beluga—a 39% decline from the average over the previous 4 years—is "sustainable and conservative," argues CITES Deputy Secretary-General Jim Armstrong. Critics are unimpressed. "I'm not at all convinced that they have a case," says Ellen Pikitch of the Wildlife Conservation Society. She hopes CITES officials change their mind before the main sturgeon harvest in the north Caspian commences in May.

Contributors: Richard Stone, Jeffrey Mervis

CREDITS: (TOP TO BOTTOM) DANIEL RYAN/NEWSPIX; HANS-JÜRGEN BURKARD/BILDBERG; CAVIAR EMPTOR