

Miscellaneous Intelligence

THE Pill would never have been developed if the clinical tests expected today had been demanded 15 years ago, according to Professor Carl Djerassi, the head of Syntex Research. The present requirements of the Food and Drugs Administration involve at least nine years of research before a new chemical contraceptive can be placed on the market.

A BUREAUCRAT'S dream is shortly to be made fact. The French government is to issue counterfoil books to doctors who in order to prescribe the contraceptive pill for a patient must fill in a coupon with the patient's name, the pill she is to take and the date of the prescription. The coupon must be retained by the pharmacist for three years. This is no mere exercise in petty tyranny. The government intends there to be 100 million Frenchmen by the turn of the century, and it does not seem to matter whether their parents wish them to be born or not.

THE programme of scientific exchanges mounted by the Royal Society is being pursued with possibly excessive zeal. In the progress report of the expedition to Central Brazil sponsored by the Royal Society and the Royal Geographic Society, it is revealed, "The studies of the Indians in the Xingú National Park were continued. Many specimens have been brought back to the United Kingdom and many more are awaiting shipment from Rio de Janeiro." (*The Royal Society—Report of Council*, p. 9, 1969). Reversing the brain drain is one thing, but the Indians waiting to be crated on the quays of Rio de Janeiro may be quite another.

EIDER down is on the way up. The eider duck, which almost joined the dodo in the last century, is proliferating at the rate of 20 per cent a year in the sanctuaries established for it on the islands of the Barents Sea and the White Sea, where 7,000 breeding sites were registered this summer.

In the wake of Armstrong, Aldrin and Collins, the lunar rocks brought back by Apollo 11 are to go on a world tour. The fifteen Moon stones, bluntly and even incompatibly described as being "about the size of a walnut or golfball", have a busy schedule ahead of them. Five are to visit thirty museums in the United States, one is to accompany the Apollo 11 command module on a tour of the fifty state capitals and another is to grace with its presence Expo-70 at Osaka. The Moon stones will start their travels just as soon as the scientists have finished with them.

AN early aircraft design by Konstantin E. Tsiolkovskii has been discovered in the archives of the University of Kazan', USSR. The design, published in 1894, is for a streamlined monoplane with internal combustion engine, wheeled chassis and an autopilot.

No one is sheltered from the veering winds of fashion but some are more subtle at yielding to them. Thirteen years ago the General Electric Company of the United States set up an organization called Technical Military Planning Operations, or TEMPO, but the acronym now turns out to stand for Technical Management Planning Operations. *Tempora mutantur, nos at mutantur in illis?*

Parliament in Britain

Cancer Research

THE financial problems of the Institute of Cancer Research, the best known part of which is the Chester Beatty Research Institute, sparked off a series of questions from Mr John Fraser about government support for cancer research.

Mr Fraser pointed out that Chester Beatty has an annual deficit of £200,000, and that it is being forced to terminate research in some areas. He also said that the British Empire Cancer Campaign last year collected £2.47 million and distributed £1.76 million, of which £245,000 went to the Chester Beatty Institute. The Imperial Cancer Research Fund, the other major charity supporting cancer research, had an unspent surplus last year of £1.55 million, eight times the deficit of the Chester Beatty Institute. This unspent surplus is being set aside for new buildings and for the employment of staff over a long period.

Mr Fraser asked if the Medical Research Council could increase its support to Chester Beatty (£485,000 a year at present), to avoid redundancies among its staff and to allow it to continue with its building programme. He also suggested that if the government were to underwrite staff and maintenance costs at the Imperial Cancer Research Fund's laboratories, this might make it easier for the fund to distribute its money for use elsewhere.

Mr Gerry Fowler, Minister of State, Department of Education and Science, said that the government relies on the Medical Research Council to exercise its own scientific judgment in establishing priorities, and it would be wrong to interfere. He also said that research councils operate by supporting particular research projects and cannot underwrite staff and maintenance costs. Mr Fowler indicated, however, that the Medical Research Council has confirmed its willingness to provide major support for Chester Beatty and that negotiations about the form of this grant are proceeding. (Written answers, November 26, and debate, November 28.)

Marine Industries Unit

MR ERIC VARLEY, Minister of State, Ministry of Technology, announced that the government is to make a grant of £85,000 over the next two years to the University of Newcastle upon Tyne to assist with the setting up of an industrial unit for research in the field of marine industries. (Written answers, November 28.)

European Telecommunications Satellite

MR NEIL CARMICHAEL, Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Technology, said that the Committee of Senior Officials of the European Space Conference agreed unanimously at a meeting on November 10 to set up a working group to consider the requirements of a European telecommunications satellite. The group will include representatives of the European Broadcasting Union and the European Conference on Posts and Telecommunications. Economic viability and the maximum benefit to European space technology are the most important criteria. He said that the United Kingdom has already indicated its willingness to participate in the development of a European television relay satellite to meet the requirements of the European Broadcasting Union. (Written answers, November 24.)