

## Japanese psychiatry

SIR—The article by Alun Anderson entitled "Abuse for visiting scientists" (*Nature* 315, 361; 1985) contains some noteworthy misunderstandings, and as one of the parties concerned we would like to clarify matters.

Protest action taken against the seventh congress of the Japanese Society on Biological Psychiatry at Gifu was not directed at the visiting scientists from the United Kingdom and the United States. The protest was made in order to obtain open public discussion on the ethics of an experiment on a human fetus carried out by Professor Masayuki Namba of Gifu University and his followers. Professor Namba, the president of the congress, was responsible for the human experiment in his capacity as director of the Department of Neurology and Psychiatry in Gifu University. But he chose to avoid discussion and to cancel the congress.

The Japanese Society on Biological Psychiatry is managed under a highly closed, almost secret system. For example, a non-member who wished to join only for the days of the congress at Gifu had to obtain a written recommendation from one of the board of directors, even though the names of directors and the address of the office are not usually announced. The society has no ethical code governing experiments involving human subjects. We have examined the summaries of papers that were to be delivered at the Gifu congress and past congresses and find evidence of many unethical experiments. So we would like to give a warning about the true nature of the society. The issue of the human experiment at Gifu is now under investigation by an *ad hoc* committee of the Japanese Society of Psychiatry and Neurology but we understand that the doctors involved in the experiment are unwilling to cooperate.

We, the Psychiatrists' Union of Tokyo University, aim to reform the present state of psychiatry in Japan and to that end will take action against unethical psychiatric conduct. A liaison group, including some of our members, has been pressing for open discussion about the Gifu experiment. This group is not, as Anderson wrote, the "antipsychiatrists within Tokyo University". Nor did this group intend to visit the smaller meeting at Nagoya. It is also not correct to describe us as "antipsychiatrists" as there are differences between our views and those of the antipsychiatrists found in the United Kingdom and Europe in the 1960s and 1970s.

Anderson states that there is no evidence of unethical conduct by the outpatients ward doctors of the University of Tokyo hospital. Why is he so dogmatic? Anderson has mentioned the horrific incidents that occurred at Utsunomiya hospital. But the outpatient doctors have long been closely connected with the Utsu-

nomiya hospital as has been widely reported in the Japanese press.

For example, the director of the Utsunomiya hospital set up an outpatient clinic near Tokyo University hospital and the outpatient doctors made use of this clinic for practice and research. Some patients were sent from this clinic to the Utsunomiya hospital. It is a fact that many of the outpatient doctors visited the Utsunomiya hospital to work or for research and contributed to the hospital's development. Many further connections exist.

The miserable state of Japan's mental hospitals as mentioned in Anderson's article is a social problem for the nation. It stems partly from the relationship between university mental hospitals as suppliers of new doctors and other mental hospitals. Many university hospitals treat the mentally ill as research objects and think little of their rights. This trend is closely related to the abuses seen at Utsunomiya where patients were forced to remain in hospital for long periods and were dominated by violent methods.

Furthermore, the government supports this situation through the Japanese Mental Health Act because few legal rights are given to patients, especially those admitted to mental hospitals. Visits from Disabled Peoples International, the International Commission of Jurists, and the International Commission of Health Professionals are necessary and important. These visits are expected to have a favourable influence upon mental health policy in Japan. We regret to say, however, that a large number of Japanese psychiatrists take attitudes similar to the outpatient doctors of Tokyo University. Reform is still far off. To be reconciled with the outpatient doctors is not easy for us at the present.

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## Slighted Dallas

SIR—In his appreciation of the 1985 Nobel Prize award in Physiology or Medicine to Michael S. Brown and Joseph L. Goldstein (*Nature* 17 October, p.569), Peter Newmark has indulged either in the subtlest of *Nature's* ironies or an insult that cannot have been intended by so sympathetic a commentator. Newmark points out that "So far all attempts to lure both of them from their opulent Dallas surroundings to more distinguished institutions have failed". As a longtime admirer not only of our new laureates but of the remarkable medical school in which they work, permit me to suggest that it might be hard, indeed, to identify "more distinguished institutions". Considering the high level of innovative science that is con-

ducted at the University of Texas Health Services Centre in Dallas, I look forward to Newmark's revised estimate of Dallas as more of her sons share the dais with the King of Sweden.

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## Irrigated tomatoes

SIR—I would advise Michael Andrews (*Nature* 17 October, p.570) not to drink water containing 3,800 micrograms of selenium per litre. As Paracelsus said, "the dose alone determines the poison", and a woman who took about 27,300 micrograms of selenium daily for 2 months had toxic symptoms<sup>1</sup>. No increase in symptom and disease reporting was found in a population drinking water containing 494 µg l<sup>-1</sup> of selenium<sup>2</sup>. Andrews does not report the selenium content of the tomatoes he filmed in July, which he wanted to eat. If they were irrigated with water from the California Aqueduct, the water was reported<sup>3</sup> in the same month to contain 0 to 2 µg l<sup>-1</sup>. Information on selenium content of common foods is supplied by Underwood<sup>4</sup>.

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1. US Public Health Service, Morbidity and Mortality Reports, 33, 157-158 (1984).
2. Valentine, J.L., Kang, H.K. & Reishord, L. Abstracts, 3rd Int. Symp. on Selenium in Biology and Medicine, Beijing, 26 May 1984, p. 139.
3. Kennedy, D.N. Report of Activities of the Department of Water Resources, Sacramento, California 20 July 1985.
4. Underwood, E.J. (ed.) *Trace Elements in Nutrition* (Academic, New York, 1977).

## Evolving journal

SIR—Your review of *Molecular Biology and Evolution* (*Nature* 26 September, p.296) contains two errors. In one, your reviewer asserts that *Molecular Biology and Evolution* "has not expanded since its first issues". The five issues of 1984, the special inaugural issue of December 1983 not being included, totalled 366 pages or 73 pages per issue. The six issues of 1985 totalled 560 pages or 92 pages per issue. That is a 25 per cent increase. That, together with the fact that, in its first year, *Molecular Biology and Evolution* circulation surpassed that of the excellent 14-year-old *Journal of Molecular Evolution*, suggests, contrary to your reviewer's report, that *Molecular Biology and Evolution* has already established itself alongside its worthy competitor.

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