

New office gets going

Washington

THE National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Scientific Integrity is changing from an administrative requirement into a reality. It has been given space on the crowded NIH campus, an acting director has been appointed and staff are being



assembled. But all this is happening despite threats from Congress that the office should be moved out of NIH to another agency that can be more objective about misconduct in biomedical research.

NIH and other federal agencies have been labouring hard over the past several months to find better ways of coping with scientific misconduct. Although few in the research community believe that the problem is widespread or growing, congressional and public interest has been fostered by several recent well-reported cases of alleged misconduct.

Earlier this year, the Public Health Service decided to create two new offices to deal with misconduct (see *Nature* 338, 588; 1989). The Office of Scientific Integrity in the office of the director of NIH will oversee — and conduct when necessary — misconduct investigations, recommend punishments and promote high standards of research conduct. The Office of Scientific Integrity Review will be in the office of the Assistant Secretary for Health of the Department of Health and Human Services, and will oversee the NIH office.

Brian Kimes, associate director for extramural programmes in the division of cancer biology and diagnosis at the National Cancer Institute, will become full-time acting director of the NIH office on 1 June, and will run the office on a part-time basis until then. Initially there will be a staff of eight, including two secretaries. Kimes expects that it will take about a year to clear the backlog of some 40 misconduct cases that are pending.

Although some cases will always take time to resolve, Kimes says a priority will be to speed up processing of the more routine cases. He also believes that as institutions receiving grants become more

adept at dealing with issues of misconduct — partly through experience and partly from guidance provided by NIH — fewer cases will require attention from NIH.

Kimes has had previous experience in misconduct, having participated in the investigation of Mark Spector, a graduate student at Cornell University. He says cutting-edge research that is somehow adulterated is easy to spot because many laboratories will quickly attempt to replicate it. Far harder to detect and punish is research that lies outside the main stream, published in journals that do not provide careful refereeing of submitted work.

Despite action by NIH, there still exists the possibility that legislation will be enacted to move the office out of NIH and into the office of the assistant secretary for health. Leslie Russell, a staff member of the powerful House of Representatives Energy and Commerce Committee, told an audience earlier this month, at a colloquium on science and technology of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, that such legislation will be introduced soon. Russell said NIH may face a conflict of interest in looking into misconduct research.

New regulations that spell out the responsibilities of federally funded institutions for investigating misconduct will be published in the near future. They are at present awaiting approval at the White House Office of Management and Budget.

Joseph Palca

CHARITIES

UK cancer fund finds new ways of making money

London

THE Imperial Cancer Research Fund (ICRF), one of Britain's largest medical research charities, has substantially increased direct expenditure on research in the 1980s, by increasing its income and eating into its investment reserves. Next year, those reserves are expected to reach £14 million, the minimum desirable, and Sir Walter Bodmer, ICRF's scientific director, now says any new plans for expansion will have to wait for three to four years until income exceeds expenditure. In the annual report, published last week, the treasurer reports a 27 per cent increase in direct expenditure on research last year, which left income almost £7 million less than expenditure, a deficit met from reserves.

Increased income has come from a new initiative — charity shops. Since 1983, ICRF has set up 200 shops, which now bring in £4 million a year. By the late 1990s, the fund hopes to have 600 shops bringing in £16 million and to double income received from legacies to £72 million.

25 years of ESA

Paris

THE European Space Agency (ESA), whose headquarters are in Paris, last week added another birthday celebration to those of the Eiffel Tower and the French Revolution. It is now 25 years since European countries officially pooled resources to form the European Space Research Organisation (ESRO) and the European Launcher Development Organisation (ELDO). These merged in 1974 to become ESA (see page 718).

Helmut Kohl, the West German Chancellor, who was in Paris for a Franco-German summit, applauded ESA's success and invited the agency to promote its role in Earth observation, both to further efforts in pollution control and also to monitor progress in disarmament — a role its constitution probably excludes. French President François Mitterrand saw ESA as also a triumph for France, the biggest partner and principal driving force behind the commercial launch sector, Arianespace, as well as the transportation elements (Hermes and Ariane 5) of Europe's Columbus contribution to the US Freedom space station.

Nobel laureate Carlo Rubbia meanwhile reminded the distinguished gathering of scientists and diplomats from ESA's 13 member states that CERN (the European Laboratory for Particle Physics), ESA's 'elder brother' in Europe's family of large organizations, was established by some of the same scientists as was ESRO.

Peter Coles

Major new projects under way include new laboratories at the Institute of Molecular Medicine in Oxford, for research into solid tumours; a new laboratory at the University of Cambridge for research into a vaccine for cervical cancer, by the ICRF's tumour virus group; and a new unit at the Institute of Psychiatry at Maudsley Hospital, London, to investigate smoking behaviour as well as examining the effects of passive smoking on children.

Expansion of the ICRF's main laboratories at Lincoln's Inn Fields, in central London, is also under way. A new building for administration and computing facilities will free space for 50 laboratory bays. Conversion into laboratories is due to begin in 1990 and will cost £3.3 million. Uncertainty about the funds that will be available could mean that completion will be slower than planned, a maximum of four years instead of three. But Bodmer says this development has top priority in the, and stresses that no existing commitments will be cut to meet costs of this expansion.

Christine McGourty