

Misconduct claims derail German study of cancer vaccines

Munich Fresh allegations of scientific misconduct are rocking the German cancer-research community.

Earlier this week, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* revealed that the University of Göttingen is investigating alleged misconduct in a project to develop a cancer 'vaccine'. The scandal comes just a year after the final report on Germany's biggest scientific fraud case, in which cancer researchers at the University of Freiburg were found to have fabricated data (see *Nature* 405, 871–872; 2000).

The new allegations surround a project that came to prominence last year, with the publication of a paper (Kugler, A. *et al. Nature Med.* 6, 332–336; 2000) reporting regression of secondary tumours. Kidney cancer patients had been treated with a vaccine composed of tumour cells fused with immune cells known as dendritic cells.

According to the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the investigation focuses on the conduct of Alexander Kugler, of the University of Göttingen, and Gernot Stuhler, of the University of Tübingen. It reportedly deals with allegations that a picture in another paper submitted for publication,

purportedly showing fused tumour–dendritic cells, had in fact been downloaded from the Internet. It also looks into claims of careless clinical practice and of endangering patients. The recruitment of new patients into the study has been suspended.

Bank of England opens door for life-sciences firm

London In an unprecedented move, the British government has arranged for Huntingdon Life Sciences (HLS), the drug-testing firm targeted by animal-rights protesters, to open an account with the Bank of England.

Usually, the Bank of England only handles accounts for government departments and other banks. The decision to extend its



Rights issue: banks severed ties with Huntingdon Life Sciences after animal-rights protests.

services to HLS marks the government's determination not to let protesters drive HLS out of business or out of the country.

Many banks and financial institutions have severed links with HLS following protests and intimidation from animal-rights activists (see *Nature* 411, 7; 2001). HLS had warned that its difficulties in finding banking facilities were forcing it to consider relocating abroad.

Japan chases blue roses and better rice

Tokyo Research on genetically modified (GM) plants is quietly progressing in Japan, thanks to investment at the regional government level. Although most Japanese biotechnology companies have backed away from GM crops for fear of a public backlash, a survey by the newspaper *Asahi Shimbun* has revealed that 34 of Japan's 47 regional administrations are investing in the technology.

Projects include efforts to create improved strains of rice, blue roses and insect-resistant grass — all with the goal of boosting the competitiveness of Japanese farmers and horticulturists. The regional governments' investment is thought to total US\$3 million per year. One strain of herbicide-resistant rice, the closest project to reaching fruition,

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is being grown in fenced experimental plots and has been approved for growth in larger, open paddies in the Aichi region.

Senate intervention halts Smithsonian closure plan

Washington A key US Senate committee has waded into the debate over the future of the Smithsonian Institution, voting to reprove a research centre that was slated for closure.

In April, staff reacted with alarm to a plan to streamline the Smithsonian's research. The plan proposed closing two of its research centres: the Conservation and Research Center in Fort Royal, Virginia, and the Center for Materials Research and Education in Suitland, Maryland (see *Nature* 410, 727; 2001).

The plan's architect, Smithsonian secretary Lawrence Small, has since backed down over closing the conservation centre. But the closure of the materials research centre, which works on techniques to preserve museum specimens and employs 29 staff, was approved in May by the Smithsonian's governing board of regents.

Both of Maryland's Democratic senators, Barbara Mikulski and Paul Sarbanes, opposed the closure. And the budget bill approved by the Senate Appropriations Committee last week maintains funding to the centre. The bill must be approved by the

full Congress and be signed by President George W. Bush before it becomes law.

Defence spin-off joins queues for contracts

London Britain's largest — and most curiously named — research company was born earlier this week, spun out of the government's Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA). The new company, QinetiQ (pronounced 'kinetic'), was launched on 1 July, taking about three-quarters of DERA's 12,000 staff.

DERA researchers who work on sensitive military projects, including countermeasures against chemical and biological weapons, remain with the Ministry of Defence, in what is now called the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory. QinetiQ will compete for commercial research contracts in areas such as applied electronics and advanced materials. Its shares will initially be owned by the government, but some will later be sold to investors.

► <http://www.qinetiq.com>

Altered orbit gives voice to silent spacecraft

Munich The Huygens probe to Saturn's moon Titan, thought to have been silenced by a

design fault, will send data as planned. Huygens, built by the European Space Agency (ESA), will be jettisoned into Titan's atmosphere from the NASA-led international Cassini spacecraft.

Cassini-Huygens has been travelling to Saturn since 1997. But last year engineers discovered that the specifications of Cassini's antenna that will receive the Huygens data failed to take account of the Doppler effect. This change in frequency occurs when a source and receiver of radio waves move relative to one another. It means that nearly all of Huygens' data would have been out of the receiver's frequency range.

An ESA/NASA task force has now come up with a rescue plan. Cassini will fly much farther from Titan than planned — 65,000 km instead of 1,200 km — and on a different trajectory. This will minimize the Doppler shift, bringing the radio frequencies into the receiver's range.

Huygens' encounter with Titan will now occur on 14 January 2005, seven weeks later than planned.



Cassini-Huygens: back on course.

ESA