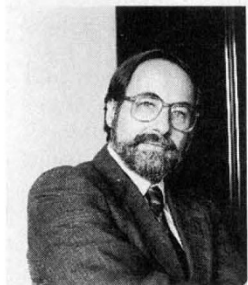


the draft report (beyond an attack on the overall process) until she is allowed to see the original laboratory notebooks on which OSI and other federal investigators carried out the forensic analysis that led them



David Baltimore

to conclude that data had been fabricated. Many of those notebooks, however, are in the hands of the US attorney, who has declined OSI's repeated request to turn them over to Imanishi-Kari. If a grand jury

reaches an indictment, a legal process known as 'discovery' will allow Imanishi-Kari and her lawyer to examine the data. Until then, OSI considers its hands tied.

The congressional Investigations and Oversight Committee of Representative John Dingell (Democrat, Michigan), which has held four hearings on the case since 1988, may hold its last in the spring — a 'lessons learned' hearing to review the way in which NIH and the relevant universities handled the allegations.

Gallo

AIDS pioneer Robert Gallo had a stormy year in 1991, and 1992 may be almost as bad, but at least one cloud should soon clear. Sources close to the investigation say that OSI is nearing completion of a report that should essentially clear Gallo of scientific misconduct in identifying and claiming the AIDS virus on the basis of a sample that later turned out to be an isolate from French scientists. In its place a new dispute is likely to arise over the 1987 patent on the AIDS test, which, by agreement, is shared by the United States and France. Central to the controversy is the question of whether Gallo — and by extension, US government officials — knew at the time of the patent application that the virus had actually been first isolated by the French.

French government officials and their lawyers are lobbying their US counterparts to reopen the patent agreements, on the grounds that they were clearly based on assumptions that have turned out to be untrue. The 1987 agreement allowed for that prospect, but not for the possibility that the statements were known to false at the time they were made. Dingell's staff, who have closely followed the case, are pursuing allegations that Gallo knew



Robert Gallo

about a 1984 study conducted by Donald Francis of the US Centers for Disease Control that showed that the US and French blood tests performed at about the same level, something that would have indicated that the French had indeed isolated the real AIDS virus.

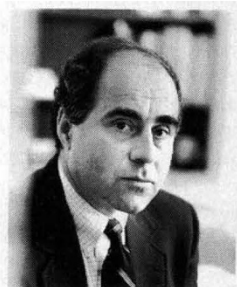
There is little doubt that a study was performed. What Dingell must prove is that Gallo was aware of the study's conclusion at the time, and that the study did show convincingly that the blood tests performed similarly. Joseph Onek, Gallo's lawyer, says that he has not seen such a study and knows of "absolutely no evidence to support the charges" that Gallo should have known that the tests were equivalent. Indeed, he says, even Luc Montagnier, Gallo's French competitor, was emphasizing differences between the viruses at the time. If experience is any guide, resolving this issue could take all year.

Cantekin

A less well-known case, but one just as relevant to the current controversy over scientific misconduct, is that of Erdem Cantekin, a bioengineer at the University of Pittsburgh.

Last month, the *Journal of the American Medical Association* published a long-delayed paper by Cantekin accompanied by an unusual five-page commentary by the West Coast editor, **D r u m m o n d Rennie**, explaining the paper's convoluted history. Five years in the making, the story has emerged in bits and pieces. Essentially, Cantekin and Charles Bluestone, another University of Pittsburgh researcher, had collaborated on a clinical trial of an antibiotic known as amoxicillin on ear infections in children. Bluestone concluded that the drug was effective; Cantekin disagreed. In 1986, the two submitted contradictory articles to the *New England Journal of Medicine*, which asked the university to identify the 'authorized' principal investigator. Pittsburgh identified Bluestone and then began disciplinary action against Cantekin for attempting to take unwarranted credit for the study.

Although an OSI investigation cleared Cantekin of wrongdoing, Pittsburgh has continued its attempts to strip him of tenure. Now that his dissenting paper has finally been published, Cantekin is preparing to take the offensive. He has filed a lawsuit against Bluestone and the hospital where they did the study to attempt to gain possession of the original data, and has



Erdem Cantekin

served six current and former Pittsburgh officials with a 40-page complaint and intent to sue, charging that they participated in a conspiracy to withhold data from the public and damage his career. He also plans to petition the US Food and Drug Agency to withdraw amoxicillin from use in children's ear infections, something that would effectively halt a market estimated at 30 million prescription a year.

Christopher Anderson

SPACE SCIENCE

Smaller, cheaper, leaner

Washington

If funding for the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) keeps up with inflation over the next few years, officials will count themselves fortunate. Throughout the agency, planners are rediscovering austerity, and shedding grand space plans as fast as they developed them in the boom years of the late 1980s.

After Congress in 1991 rejected NASA's proposal to start planning for a mission to Mars, the agency is planning to return with a much more modest strategy involving cheap robotic missions. In its 1993 budget request (which will be released next month) NASA is expected to ask for some \$50 million in start-up funds to begin planning several unmanned missions to the Moon, with the aim of developing techniques that could be used someday on Mars.

The proposed space station, which spent much of 1991 precariously balanced on the edge of cancellation, now seems politically secure, if somewhat battered. Still overweight, underpowered, and needing constant maintenance in its latest planned incarnation, the project has become an mechanical, rather than a political, challenge. "It's up to the engineers to make it work now," says George Washington University space analyst John Logsdon.

But if the space station will not be 1992's whipping boy, the Advanced Solid Rocket Motor may take its place. The \$465-million effort to develop a next generation of engines for the space shuttle owes more to the desire of House Appropriations Committee chairman Jamie Whitten (Democrat, Mississippi) to create jobs in his home state than any pressing NASA needs. Now that the shuttle programme itself has been discontinued, the Administration is planning to put its foot down on what it sees as a particularly egregious example of 'pork barrel' funding. President Bush is expected to seek the cancellation of the project this year, something that seems sure to prompt a nasty response from Whitten and could tangle the rest of the NASA budget in political infighting.

Christopher Anderson