

French physicians charged over growth hormone 'poisoning'

[PARIS] Five French physicians and health officials who were charged with involuntary homicide in 1993 in the contaminated human growth hormone affair now risk being tried on the more serious charge of poisoning. This follows revelations that the Paris hospital authority continued to distribute potentially contaminated hormone after its use had been forbidden.

The United States banned the use of pituitary growth hormone extracted from cadavers in April 1985 after a confirmed case of Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD). The United Kingdom imposed a similar ban the following month. France Hypophyse (France Pituitary), the body responsible for producing and distributing the hormone, continued to allow use of the hormone provided it had been treated with urea, a procedure considered to inactivate the prion.

But the magazine *L'Express* revealed last week that the judge investigating the French cases has found that the central pharmacy of the Paris Hospital Authority continued to distribute 20,000 ampoules of potentially contaminated hormone until the early months of 1996. The doses are estimated to have had a value of US\$1 million.

Data 'adequate' for UK nuclear waste lab

[LONDON] Enough is known about hydrogeological conditions at Sellafield in Cumbria to allow the building of an underground laboratory to investigate the storage of low- and intermediate-level nuclear waste, according to scientists asked by the UK nuclear industry's waste-disposal agency, Nirex, to review its research.

Nirex's plans for the laboratory have met with concern about a perceived lack of hydrogeological data at the proposed site (see *Nature* 383, 751; 1996). But the scientists reviewing Nirex's findings have concluded that there is sufficient data both to model groundwater flow in undisturbed conditions and to act as a 'baseline' against which disturbance caused by constructing the laboratory could be measured.

Whale makes waves with record swim

[LONDON] A humpback whale has slashed more than one month off the record for the fastest whale migration from Alaska to Hawaii. The whale, known simply as 339, completed the 2,775-mile journey across the Pacific Ocean in 39 days. The average migration time is about 102 days, with fast migrations at about 80 days, according to

Janet Straley of the University of Alaska South East, who reports the finding in the journal *Marine Mammal Science*.

US gene therapy group to promote research

[WASHINGTON] A group of medical geneticists in the United States has formed an organization to exchange ideas and information about gene therapy, and to promote research and public education. The American Society of Gene Therapy is headed by George Stamatoyannopoulos, professor of medicine and genetics at the University of Washington School of Medicine in Seattle. Its first meeting will take place in Seattle.

Test telescope opens at the South Pole

[SYDNEY] The first astronomical facility from Australia to be set up on the high plateau of Antarctica, which makes up most of the centre of the continent, was opened last week at the South Pole, 2,385 metres above sea level.

The Automated Astronomical Site Testing Observatory is a A\$1-million (US\$790,000) joint venture of the University of New South Wales and the Australian National University, in collaboration with the US Center for Astrophysical Research in



So far, systems in the ÄKTA design family include:

- ÄKTAexplorer, for method development and scale up of every biomolecule
- the new ÄKTApurifier, for purification of peptides, oligonucleotides and other biomolecules