

## Science embryology paper retracted after inquiry

Three out of the four authors of a *Science* paper on embryonic development have retracted it (R. M. Roberts *et al.* *Science* 317, 450; 2007) after a year-long university investigation found the lead author on the original paper guilty of research misconduct.

The University of Missouri investigation was prompted by suggestions from leading embryologists that figures in the article were manipulated. It exonerated senior author Michael Roberts and two others on the paper (K. Deb *et al.* *Science* 311, 992–996; 2006) — but found postdoc Kaushik Deb guilty of falsifying and fabricating data.

Robert Hall, vice-chancellor for research at the university, says its findings are now under review by the federal Office of Research Integrity, which may levy sanctions against Deb. Deb's name does not appear on the retraction, and according to press reports, he fled the United States at the start of the investigation.

## Agent Orange linked to high blood pressure

The defoliant Agent Orange, used by the United States during the Vietnam War, may have caused high blood pressure in some veterans exposed to it, says the US Institute of Medicine (IOM).

Its report — the latest in a congressionally mandated series — finds “suggestive but limited” evidence of an association between exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides used in the war and an increased chance of developing high blood pressure. Some of the herbicides used in Vietnam contained a dioxin, TCDD.

The report also reached the same conclusion regarding amyloidosis, a

## Coral reefs in danger from oil clean-up

The chemicals used to clean up oil spills pose a far greater threat to coral reefs than the oil itself, according to an Israeli study.

Researchers at the National Institute of Oceanography in Haifa observed 100% mortality among corals treated in the laboratory with recommended concentrations of ‘environmentally improved’ dispersants, which break up crude oil into tiny droplets. Exposure to crude oil alone, in contrast, had no impact on the survival of the coral (*Environ. Sci. Technol.* doi:10.1021/es0704582; 2007).

Many tankers carrying crude oil pass through tropical seas rich in coral reefs. In August 2006, for example, a tanker sank near the coral-rich Guimaras Island in the central Philippines, spilling around 350,000 litres of oil into the sea (see picture). Mechanical containment and biodegrading microorganisms are often better alternatives to chemical clean-up, the authors of the study say.



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serious disease in which amyloid proteins are deposited in and around organs, sometimes resulting in organ failure. In previous reports, the IOM found positive associations between the herbicides and several cancers.

## Three-pronged genetic AIDS trial ready to go

A pioneering approach that combines gene therapy with RNA interference is to be tested on patients with AIDS.

The trial will use a gene therapy vector made from a lentivirus to shuttle in three different genetic defences against HIV. One is a short stretch of RNA designed to shut down the virus through RNA interference (see *Nature* 437, 601; 2005).

The vector will be used to treat blood-forming stem cells taken from five patients with AIDS who require bone marrow transplants to treat blood cancer. The treated stem cells will then be infused back into the patients' bodies, where it is hoped that they will combat HIV.

Molecular biologist John Rossi told the International AIDS Society meeting in Sydney, Australia, that the trial is about to begin at the City of Hope Beckman Research Institute in Duarte, California.

## Network to target minorities' health

The US National Institutes of Health is to set up a network between medical schools to improve clinical research into diseases that disproportionately afflict African Americans, Hispanics and other minorities.

A three-year, US\$9.5-million grant from

the National Center for Research Resources at the NIH will be shared between eight medical schools that serve minority communities. As well as coordinating research into diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and AIDS, the project will seek to enrol minorities in clinical studies of new therapies.

Keith Norris, vice-president for research at Charles Drew University in Los Angeles, California, who will head the initiative, says he wants to translate leading-edge biological research into better healthcare for minorities. “We clearly have certain insights and understandings, but they haven't led to improvement in the health outcomes,” he says.

## MPs criticize research agency appointment

A UK parliamentary committee has criticized the appointment of engineer John Chisholm to chair the Medical Research Council, Britain's main biomedical research agency.

The House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, which oversees such appointments but cannot veto them, said it had “serious reservations” about whether Chisholm was the right person to guide the council. At a hearing on 20 June, he appeared to “lack the necessary knowledge” to discuss the MRC's relationship with other research councils, it said.

Chisholm — an engineer with a background in the computer software industry — was appointed as chair of the MRC last October, replacing another former computer-industry executive, Anthony Cleaver. A spokeswoman for the MRC said it had no immediate comment, but the government is expected to respond formally to the committee later this year.



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Agent Orange: a legacy of ill-health.