

## Back to basics for HIV vaccine development

The US programme to develop an HIV vaccine will shift funding back towards basic research and away from clinical trials of candidate vaccines, officials at the National Institutes of Health announced last week.

The decision follows the discontinuation last year of trials for Merck's candidate HIV vaccine, in which participants showed higher rates of HIV infection than the

unvaccinated population. Merck's was one of only three vaccines to make it to large-scale clinical trials. A second had already failed, and there are doubts about the ability of the third to stimulate the immune system.

The vaccine pipeline needs refilling, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases director Anthony Fauci said on 25 March. "We need to turn the knob in the direction of discovery — that is unambiguous."

See Editorial, page 503.

## US medical school to require master's degree

The Scripps Research Institute and its clinical partners are forming the first US medical school that will require applicants to have a master's degree. Scripps, which is based in La Jolla, California, expects to enrol its first 40 students in 2010.

"The master's will be in translational medicine," says Scripps cardiologist Eric Topol, the school's founding dean. "Our mission is to encourage a new genre of physician-investigator."

The medical training will take place in existing facilities, but Scripps is seeking philanthropic support for much of the school's \$150-million cost, Topol says.

Many US medical schools offer combined MD-PhD programmes for some students, but Scripps is the first to make a master's degree a requirement.

## Too much haste in US drug approval?

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) may be issuing shaky last-minute drug approvals, according to a new study.

In an article in the *New England Journal of*

## Tasting a geyser

The geyser of ice and water vapour erupting from the south pole of Enceladus, a tiny moon of Saturn, contains complex organic molecules, NASA scientists have discovered.

The Cassini spacecraft flew through the plume on 12 March and got its first good taste of the jet's chemistry — which is unexpectedly similar to that of a comet.

The flyby results, reported on 26 March, also include thermal images of the four long cracks from which the plume emanates. At their hottest, the cracks were 93 °C warmer than the rest of the moon, indicating underground reservoirs of liquid water. This all suggests that Enceladus formed differently from, and probably later than, the rest of the Saturn system.

