

Massachusetts finally passes life-sciences bill

The Massachusetts legislature has approved a 10-year, US\$1-billion life sciences bill aimed at attracting biotechnology companies to the state. The bill has been championed by Governor Deval Patrick, who signed it into law on 16 June.

The legislation will fund several university research centres, \$250 million in tax credits and \$250 million in grants, among other projects.

Although legislators overwhelmingly supported the bill, it has generated some controversy. Economists voiced scepticism after Patrick claimed that the funding would generate 250,000 jobs in the state — a figure many considered overly optimistic. While under consideration in the legislature, the bill picked up several controversial additions, including a proposed \$50-million science centre at the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts in North Adams, which does not have a graduate programme in science. That earmark has since been removed.

Anti-AIDS vitamin advertising banned

A South African judge has ruled that clinical trials purporting to test the effectiveness of vitamins against AIDS were illegal, and that vitamins should not be advertised as therapies for AIDS.

The ruling covers 12 defendants, including German doctor Matthias Rath and American doctor David Rasnick, a former advisor to President Thabo Mbeki. The pair had been selling vitamin therapies as AIDS treatments, advertising them as effective and saying that anti-retroviral drugs were toxic.

The lawsuit was brought by the South African advocacy group Treatment Action Campaign and the South African Medical Association, which argued that



Demonstrators campaigned for Matthias Rath's clinical trials to be judged illegal.

Virtual butterflies

This *Papilio paris* L., or Paris peacock butterfly, is one of the digitized images being published online from the collections of the Linnean Society of London.

Butterflies and moths — many of them reference or 'type' specimens named by Carl Linnaeus — are being added to celebrate Britain's National Insect Week in late June. The society has already put plant specimens and correspondence online at www.linnean.org.

The Paris peacock is a swallowtail butterfly native to southeast Asia.



LINNEAN SOCIETY, WWW.LINNEAN.ORG

the defendants had violated national regulations covering medicines and related substances.

During the trial the country's health minister, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, argued that the therapies should not be covered by the regulations as they were not medicines.

Researcher suspended for falsifying data

The Ottawa Health Research Institute last week suspended postdoctoral fellow Kristin Roovers after learning that she had manipulated and falsified data published in several papers.

Roovers was hired by the institute in 2005. But in July 2007, the US Office of Research Integrity concluded that Roovers, while a graduate student and postdoctoral fellow at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, had manipulated 19 panels of western blot data. She had used Photoshop to copy a set of bands and paste them into other blots representing data from different experiments. The data ultimately appeared in 11 figures in three publications.

Two of the papers (K. Roovers and R. K. Assoian *Mol. Cell. Biol.* 23, 4283–4294; 2003, and K. Roovers *et al. Dev. Cell* 5, 273–284; 2003) have been retracted. A decision on the third (C. F. Welsh *et al. Nature Cell Biol.* 3, 950–957; 2001) is pending.

The Office of Research Integrity barred Roovers from receiving any US government grants for five years.

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Stem-cell society condemns medical tourism

In a strike against stem-cell tourism, the International Society for Stem Cell Research (ISSCR) last week officially condemned unproven stem-cell treatments that lack appropriate oversight or patient monitoring, or use poorly characterized

cells. The society advised clinicians to refuse to participate in nonconforming activities "as a matter of professional ethics".

To help patients make better-informed decisions, an ISSCR task force is drafting guidelines to define when patients should receive stem cells or their derivatives. The draft guidelines were scheduled for release last Thursday, but after disagreements about specificity and tone, the task force decided to announce general principles instead.

The society will not enforce them or evaluate individual clinics for compliance. Instead, the hope is that the guidelines will push countries to adopt and enforce harmonized regulatory standards.

Guidelines cover how cells should be processed and characterized, what preclinical evidence should be collected and what information patients must receive. They also say that stem-cell researchers should consider how their work stands to benefit society as a whole.

Lab-equipment giants set to merge

Two California firms that produce tools vital to the biotechnology industry will merge by the autumn.

Invitrogen of Carlsbad is acquiring Applera's Applied Biosystems Group of Foster City for US\$6.7 billion in cash and stock. If approved by shareholders, the combined operations will be called Applied Biosystems, with corporate headquarters in Carlsbad.

Applied Biosystems, with annual revenue of \$2.1 billion, is widely known for producing the genetic-sequencing tools used in the Human Genome Project. Invitrogen, with \$1.3 billion in annual revenue, is a major supplier of reagents, cells and test kits.

Invitrogen's Gregory Lucier will be chairman of the board and chief executive of the new firm, with Applied Biosystems' Mark Stevenson as president and chief operating officer.