

NEWS BRIEFING

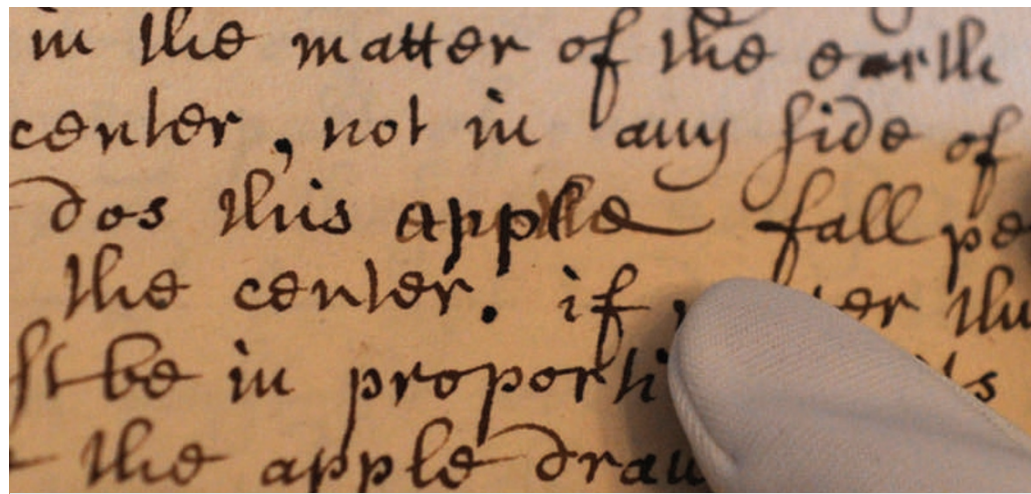
● POLICY

Bisphenol A: The US Food and Drug Association (FDA) has altered its position on bisphenol A, announcing on 15 January that it has “some concern” about the potential effects of the chemical on the health of fetuses and young children. “Some concern” means that we need to know more,” said FDA commissioner Margaret Hamburg. The agency will conduct further studies over the next 18–24 months, she added. In August 2008, the FDA ruled the chemical safe, to criticism from researchers including the agency’s own external science board.

African physics launch: At a pan-African conference in Dakar, Senegal, on 12 January scientists launched the African Physical Society, a continent-wide professional association of physicists. The organization hopes to boost Africa’s bid for the enormous Square Kilometre Array radio telescope; a decision on whether Australia or Africa will host the array is expected by the end of 2012.

Open-access call: For-profit publishers are among a panel of experts calling for US federally funded research papers to be made open access. The 14-member group, which included information researchers, librarians and academic administrators, reported its findings on 12 January. The report, requested by the House Committee on Science and Technology, says that all research-funding agencies should develop explicit public-access policies, probably including an embargo period of up to a year between publication and public access.

Pandemic questioned: The World Health Organization (WHO) on 14 January fended off criticism from the media and politicians that the influence of vaccine manufacturers led it to hype the H1N1 flu pandemic. To call the pandemic fake “is both



L. YOUNG/AP

NEWTON AND THE APPLE

One of the earliest manuscripts to record Isaac Newton’s tale that a falling apple set him thinking about gravity — perhaps the most enduring anecdote of scientific discovery — is now online in its original form. Britain’s Royal Society has digitized, among other works, the pages of William Stukeley’s 1752 *Memoirs of Sir Isaac Newton’s Life* — previously available online only as raw text (see go.nature.com/AIWLCZ). In the book (pictured), Stukeley, a contemporary of Newton’s, relates the tale from a 1726 conversation under some apple trees: “he told me, he was just in the same situation, as when formerly, the notion of gravitation came into his mind”.

wrong and is irresponsible”, said Keiji Fukuda, special adviser on pandemic influenza to the WHO director-general. Earlier in the week, the organization said that there would be an independent examination of its handling of the outbreak once the pandemic is declared to be over.

● RESEARCH

Herschel instrument back: The Heterodyne Instrument for the Far Infrared (HIFI) spectrometer on the European Space Agency’s Herschel Space Observatory is working again. Damage to the instrument’s controls — possibly due to a collision with a cosmic-ray particle — had stopped it working in August 2009. HIFI will scan gas clouds swirling between stars, to understand star formation.

Grants censure: Researchers at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas, face greater scrutiny of their grants after the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) found the institution was not complying with the agency’s financial conflict-of-

interest rules. In a 14 January letter, NIH director Francis Collins confirmed that Baylor failed to inform the NIH about drugmaker payments disclosed by an NIH-funded cardiologist at the college. The agency has asked Baylor to review financial disclosures from 2004 to the present and wants specific assurance that new grants comply with NIH policy. Baylor says that it is recrafting its policies to meet NIH standards. See go.nature.com/wot5Vv for more.

Haiti earthquake: US geologists hope to gather data next week from the magnitude-7.0 quake that struck near Port-au-Prince in Haiti on 12 January and killed tens of thousands of people. See page 276 for more.

Neutrino thumbs-up: A proposed long-distance neutrino beam was granted initial approval by the US Department of Energy on 8 January, project officials said last week. The Long Baseline Neutrino Experiment would generate neutrinos at the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory in Batavia, Illinois.

NUMBER CRUNCH \$28.8m

The revised cost for acquiring and displaying one of the space shuttles after the programme winds up this year. Discovery has already been claimed by the National Air and Space Museum in Washington DC; Endeavour and Atlantis are still up for grabs.

TURNBACKTHECLOCK.ORG

The beam would strike detectors 1,000 kilometres away at DUSEL, a planned lab in an abandoned mine in South Dakota.

Temperature records: Nine of the eleven warmest years since records began in 1880 occurred during the past decade, according to a 15 January report by the National Climatic Data Center in Asheville, North Carolina, part of the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). On the basis of data released by NOAA, combined land and ocean surface temperatures put 2009 in joint place for fifth warmest on record; preliminary data from NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies in New York have it tied as second warmest.

Neglected-disease partnerships: GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) announced measures on 20 January to promote an 'open innovation' strategy for getting medicines to poor countries. As well as creating knowledge-sharing collaborations, GSK is allowing up to 60 scientists to work on their own projects at an 'open lab', based at the company's facility in Tres Cantos, Spain, supported by an US\$8-million investment. And GSK has made public the details of 13,500 compounds that screening suggests might inhibit the malaria parasite. See go.nature.com/SjJdm6 for more.

● **PEOPLE**

Iranian killing: University of Tehran particle physicist Masoud Alimohammadi was assassinated

NEWS MAKER



Doomsday clock

The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists has nudged back its 'doomsday clock' — on which midnight symbolizes the end of civilization due to threats such as nuclear war. It is now a minute further back than in 2007.

on 12 January, leaving Iranian academics in fear of further attacks. See page 279 for analysis.

Chemist heads CNRS: As *Nature* went to press, the French government was expected to appoint Alain Fuchs as chief executive of the country's basic-research agency, the CNRS. Fuchs, a chemist, currently heads the institute Chimie ParisTech.

The CNRS job will combine the existing posts of president and director-general, whose terms of office expire this month. Fuchs's appointment comes at a crucial time for the CNRS, as the government moves to shift research power and funding away from national research agencies to universities.

Nobel scientist dies: Geneticist and biochemist Marshall Nirenberg, who shared the 1968 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine for his work on deciphering the three-letter genetic code, died aged 82 on 15 January. He worked at the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) from 1957 until his death, and was the first intramural NIH scientist to win a Nobel prize.

● **FUNDING**

European grants awarded: The European Research Council on 14 January announced grants for 236 research leaders across Europe, totalling around €515 million (US\$740 million) in funding. This is the second 'advanced grants' competition for the funding body, a pan-European initiative established in 2007 to support research on the basis of excellence. Its management is currently undergoing reform.

ArXiv support: The preprint server arXiv.org, the popular repository for physics papers, is seeking donations to keep it running. Since 2001, arXiv has been run by the Cornell University Library in Ithaca, New York. But the library says

THE WEEK AHEAD

23 JANUARY
The 50th anniversary of the deepest-ever manned ocean dive. In 1960, Jacques Piccard and Don Walsh took the bathyscaphe *Trieste* almost 11,000 metres to the bottom of the Mariana Trench.

24-29 JANUARY
The Arctic Frontiers conference in Tromsø, Norway, discusses research, governance and sustainable development in the Arctic.
♦ www.arctic-frontiers.com

25-26 JANUARY
The Royal Society in London hosts a meeting on the detection of extraterrestrial life, and what its consequences would be for science and society.
♦ go.nature.com/ThxodX

25-29 JANUARY
The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) holds a conference on biodiversity, focusing on policy priorities.
♦ go.nature.com/dymHtz

that it can no longer afford the US\$400,000 annual operating costs. This week, it is expected to ask the top 200 institutional users of arXiv to make voluntary contributions. The repository says that it remains committed to keeping its content free for researchers.

BUSINESS WATCH

"We were fighting the 2009 H1N1 flu with vaccine technology from the 1950s," said Kathleen Sebelius, secretary of the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), in December 2009. Her view highlights frustrations with the slow process of making flu vaccines in chicken eggs.

Increased investment in vaccine research and development has spurred competition to replace the technique. Prospective candidates include growing flu vaccines in cultures of mammalian, insect, plant, bacterial or fungal cells.

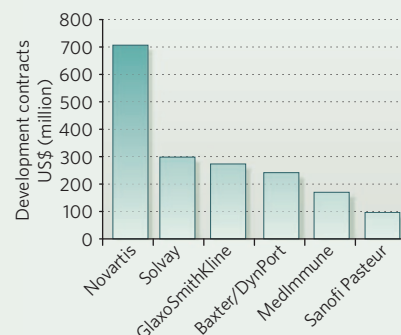
In the past five years, the HHS alone has awarded nearly US\$1.8 billion to major pharmaceutical companies to accelerate

cell-based flu vaccine development, according to analysis conducted for *Nature* by consultants PharmaVentures in Oxford, UK (see chart).

So far only Swiss firm Novartis and Baxter of Deerfield, Illinois, have European approval for mammalian-cell flu vaccines, and the United States has not yet approved any cell-based flu vaccines. In November 2009, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) ruled that a technology developed by Protein Sciences, a biopharmaceutical company in Meriden, Connecticut, needed more data. The company needs to complete more safety studies before the FDA will give the green light to the caterpillar-cell manufacturing process.

FLU VACCINES OUTSIDE EGGS

In 2005-09, the US government has awarded pharmaceutical companies millions to develop cell-based flu vaccines.



SOURCE: PHARMAVENTURES