Families of young girls with Rett syndrome want barriers lifted to speed research on the disease.

colleagues said that they would have liked to but couldn't because of the terms of Novartis's licence on EGFP, which it obtained from GE Healthcare.

Novartis and GE have been unable to negotiate a way to share the mice, says Jeff Lockwood, spokesman for the Novartis Institutes for Biomedical Research — even though Novartis has ended its research project on the mice.

When Monica Coenraads, executive director of the Rett Syndrome Research Trust in Trumbull, Connecticut, tried to broker an agreement to share the mice, GE and Novartis asked the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland, to distribute the mice through its Mutant Mouse Regional Resource Centers. But Lili Portilla, senior adviser for technology transfer at the NIH National Center for Research Resources, which funds the resource centre, says that GE placed such burdensome terms on the sharing that the NIH eventually gave up. For instance, researchers would not have been allowed to share the results of their research with the NIH, says Portilla.

GE spokesman Conor McKechnie blames the "third parties" from which GE gained the rights to the EGFP protein for the onerous licensing requirements. But David Einhorn, house counsel at the Jackson Laboratory in Bar Harbor, Maine, which distributes mice to researchers around the world, questions GE's contention. He points out that many other mouse models that incorporate the gene for EGFP have been made and shared without objection from GE or from the institutions that originally discovered and licensed the EGFP patents.

Researchers have had trouble sharing resources for decades, but the situation seems to be getting worse. A 2007 study, for instance, found that 18% of academics' requests for research materials from other academic labs were not fulfilled (see 'Limited access') — almost twice as many as found in a survey taken during the 1990s. For materials requested from industry, the 2007 study found, one-third of academics' requests were declined (J. P. Walsh, W. M. Cohen and C. Cho *Res. Pol.* **36,** 1184–1203; 2007).

Companies that don't want to share their resources don't usually publish papers describing them, says lawyer Tania Bubela of the University of Alberta School of Public Health in Edmonton, Canada. A publication changes the picture, she says. "The obligation of publication is to make your data and reagents available, so that people can replicate the results."

With no sign of a resolution, other labs have resorted to remaking the mouse model. Adrian Bird, director of the University of Edinburgh's Wellcome Trust Centre for Cell Biology, UK, says that his lab has re-engineered the mice and will distribute them through a repository, such as the Jackson Laboratory, as soon as his colony is large enough.

Bird and others say that it is unfortunate that scientists have had to delay research on the syndrome and spend money to regenerate a model that could already be in use.

"If you were to ask the families of people affected by this disease, they would say that every minute counts," says Bird. ■

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CORRECTION

The News Feature 'The Genome Finishers' (*Nature* **462,** 843–845; 2009) incorrectly states that a gap in the reference sequence of chromosome 4 was a deletion flanked by large gene duplications. The gap was an assembly error caused by attempting (and failing) to merge two alternative versions of gene sequence, which then erroneously appeared in the reference as large duplications in the UGT2B17 region.