

from contact between the surrogate mother and the prospective parents. The report also recommends there should be a medical assessment of all the parties involved, and calls for "discussion before pregnancy is established of who will decide how to proceed if some abnormality is detected."

There are two recognized surrogacy agencies in the United Kingdom, the best known of which is Childlessness Overcome Through Surrogacy (COTS), run by Kim Cotton, the surrogate mother

whose commercial arrangement led to the 1985 act. COTS has overseen nearly 150 surrogate births since 1988. Although the BMA does not want a formal system of licensing such voluntary agencies, it does call for some sort of government monitoring of them. According to the BMA, because these agencies are forbidden from charging for their services, they cannot afford expert legal advice or other forms of support.

NUALA MORAN
London

Lorne Cancer Conference gains stature and numbers

A new species can be seen among the flocks making their annual summertime migration to Australia's sunny southern shores — northern cancer researchers. The Lorne Cancer Conference held each February in Lorne, Victoria, is now a major destination on the conference circuit. Resembling the Gordon Conferences in format, the conference is a mixture of the year's best in cancer research combined with plenty of free time for scientific interchanges, all amidst relaxed (and breathtaking) surroundings.

Ashley Dunn and Tony Burgess (both from the Ludwig Institute for Cancer Research in Melbourne) started the Lorne cancer conference some eight years ago. Their vision was for a small informal conference designed to bring clinicians and researchers together. Though no longer small (this year there were nearly 600 participants), the bringing together of a broad spectrum of people with an interest in cancer continues to be one of the conference's strengths. "Unlike more specialist meetings, we don't have our minds set," says Dunn. "We have the flexibility each year to sit around and ask 'who is doing the best work in cancer at that time?' That's how we begin to form our cast of speakers."

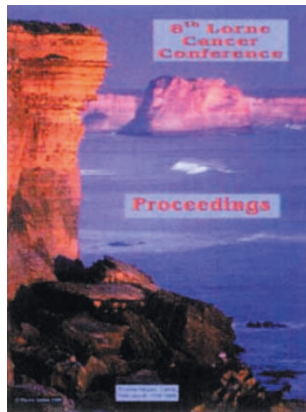
This year's highlights included up-to-

date information on the telomerase story (Carol Greider of Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in New York, Sylvia Bacchetti from McMaster University in Canada, and Roger Reddel of Children's Medical Research Institute in New South Wales), signal transduction (Tony Hunter of the Salk Institute and Robert Tjian from the University of California at Berkeley), and tumor suppressors and oncogenes (Robert Weinberg of the Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research, David Baltimore from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and David Lane of the University of Dundee, Scotland).

Dunn also attributes some of the conference's success to the isolation of Lorne. "It's hard to escape, so people tend to do what we put on, like bushwalking or mountain bike tours." That all works to promote effective mixing of the scientific cauldron.

The 1997 conference will be held jointly with the American Association of Cancer Research. According to the organizers, the joint meeting will follow the same formula as the regular Lorne conference, with the exception of a larger contribution of talent from the northern hemisphere.

ELLA FINKEL
Melbourne, Australia



The cover of the proceedings of the Eighth Annual Lorne Cancer Conference features scenery from Australia's southern coast.



Arthur Beudet, acting director of the new Shell Center for Gene Therapy at Baylor College of Medicine.

Shell oils Baylor gene therapy

Gene therapy research at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas, received a welcome boost in late February when the college was given a donation of US\$5 million from the Shell Oil Company Foundation. The windfall — which is the largest single gift ever made by the foundation in its 43 years of operation — will go toward establishing the Shell Center for Gene Therapy at Baylor.

The search is now on for a leader in the field to head the new center, says Arthur L. Beudet, acting chairman of molecular and human genetics at Baylor, as well as acting director of the new center until a permanent director is found. In addition to existing faculty with research interests in gene therapy, Beudet expects that "a significant number of new positions for scientists will be part of this new commitment and expansion."

Baylor's efforts in gene therapy will be coordinated with its major affiliated teaching hospitals, such as Methodist Hospital, and will include continued support for the recently built Baylor Gene Therapy Vector Laboratory at Texas Children's Hospital.

The new center will emphasize basic science and animal studies and, as such, will be in keeping with the key recommendations of a report issued last December on the US National Institutes of Health's investment in gene therapy research (*Nature Medicine* 2, 7; 1996). The report cautioned that some researchers are trying to run before they can walk by moving to clinical trials prematurely. "To the extent that one is going to embark on clinical trials, they should be very carefully designed and very rigorous," says Beudet. While in general agreement with the central thrust of the report, Beudet says he is "sympathetic to the fact that some people in the field felt a little overly criticized."

DIANE GERSON