

## 'Open access' movement gains momentum

Support for 'open-access' publications—which allow readers free access to research papers by charging authors a fee to publish their work—has received a big push from scientists and funding agencies in the US and Europe.

Peter Walter and Keith Yamamoto of the University of California in San Francisco in October sent a letter to their colleagues worldwide, encouraging them to boycott the Elsevier-owned Cell Press journals—including *Cell* and its spin-offs, *Immunity*, *Neuron* and *Structure*. The researchers are protesting the journals' \$90,000 subscription fee, which is in addition to the \$8 million paid in 2002 by the University of California schools to access other Elsevier journals. Cell Press responded by offering the schools free access until the end of the year, but Walter and Yamamoto are maintaining their call for a boycott.

Meanwhile, the UK's Wellcome Trust, Germany's Max Planck Society and Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, France's Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, the Howard Hughes Medical Institute in the US, and other major research institutions have also lent their support to open-access publishing. Many institutions now promise to cover author fees for publishing in journals such as the recently launched *PLoS Biology*. *PL*

## FDA reconsiders stance on cloned food

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is rethinking its position on the commercialization of milk, meat and other food products from cloned animals or their offspring, after an independent scientific advisory panel called for more data on the issue.

The majority of panel members agree that cloned products would be safe for consumption, but say the scientific data—summarized in a preliminary FDA report on 4 November—may be too flimsy to appease the wary public. The panel was also concerned about the welfare of cloned animals and their surrogate mothers, which can experience more severe health problems than normal animals.

The final policy decision is expected in early 2004. Until then, cloning companies are voluntarily withholding their products from the commercial market. *PL*

News briefs written by Pierrette Lo and Aparna Surendran

## Approving implants, 'misguided' panel chair says

In an unusual move, the chairman of a US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) advisory panel, which in October approved the return of silicone breast implants, has asked the FDA commissioner not to follow the panel's advice.

Thomas Whalen, a professor of surgery at the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, says the panel's decision was "misguided."

Long-term safety "was clearly not demonstrated, and to approve this device poses threats to women that are clearly unknown," he wrote.

The FDA took most silicone breast implants off the market in 1992, after leaking silicone was thought to cause cancer and other health problems. Last December, Inamed Corporation asked the FDA for permission to once again begin selling the implants (*Nat. Med.* 9, 251; 2003).

In October, the FDA requested an independent panel to look into the matter. The panel suggested, in a 9–6 vote, to allow the sale of implants, but with certain conditions such as teaching patients and surgeons about implant use. As chairman of that panel, Whalen could not vote.

The FDA, which had no comment, has yet to make a decision. Inamed spokesperson Peter Nicholson says the company "remains confident in the FDA's science-based process and their thorough review of the data presented." *AS*

## Clinton brokers AIDS deal

Four generic-drug manufacturers will sell cheaper AIDS antiretroviral drugs (ARVs) to some African and Caribbean countries, under an agreement negotiated by the William J. Clinton Presidential Foundation.

Under the new agreement, the cocktail, a combination of three drugs—two nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors and either a non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitor or an HIV protease inhibitor—will cost about \$0.38 a day for two commonly used regimens. Previously, the price of the drugs was about 33–50% higher.

According to the World Health Organization, of the approximately 5–6 million people in developing countries in need of AIDS treatment, less than 300,000 have access to ARVs. In Africa, only about 1% of all HIV-positive people can get ARVs. The objective of the deal is to provide the medicine to about 2 million people in developing countries by 2008, Clinton said.

Funding for the deal came through lobbying private donors and richer countries such as Canada and Ireland. Ireland has agreed to give \$58.3 million over five years, primarily to Mozambique. *AS*

**Correction:** The profile of Tak Mak (*Nat. Med.* 9, 1233; 2003) failed to mention that an independent panel found that the allegations Mak made against Josef Penninger were completely unfounded. The article also incorrectly implied that Penninger resigned as a result of the confrontation.

## Mosquito-borne illnesses claim hundreds in India

Stagnant water left over from heavy monsoon rains has spread mosquito-borne viruses that have caused more than 220 deaths since August in Uttar Pradesh, India's largest state.

In Uttar Pradesh, there have been 926 illnesses and 205 deaths from encephalitis, and 384 illnesses and 18 deaths due to dengue fever, according to the state's Health Directorate. More than 7,400 cases of dengue have been reported nationwide.

The last dengue outbreak in India, which occurred in New Delhi in 1996, caused up to 10,000 illnesses and about 400 deaths. This year, the city has seen 2,663 illnesses and 33 deaths, prompting it to launch an investigation into two health department officials' handling of the crisis.

Dengue symptoms include body aches and fever. In severe cases, patients have internal bleeding and need blood transfusions. The mosquito-borne illnesses have been exacerbated by inadequate sanitation and supplies. For instance, Uttar Pradesh's capital, Lucknow, does not have enough fog machines to spray insecticide, and at least one hospital in the city has had to turn patients away because it did not have enough platelets available to treat dengue. *AS*



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