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Experimental drug may cause blindness, scientists worry

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says David Victor, a law professor and energy expert at Stanford University in Palo Alto. "If the Russian relations with the West sour, that presumably will make Russia less willing to sign on to international agreements that they don't see in their national interest," he says. More broadly, he thinks that Russia might also reconsider Western investment in its old industrial and new high-tech sectors.

Meanwhile, Russian scientists involved in collaborations with the West hope that the current tensions will not lead to restrictions in terms of mobility and scientific exchange. "If that happens," says Konstantin Severinov, a molecular biologist at the Institute of Gene Biology in Moscow, "there will be a long-lasting negative effect on Russian science, as it already has strong isolationist tendencies."

Russian researchers have lately experienced a resurgence of state control over their work. For example, Severinov says that he was recently approached by a 'curator' with the Russian Federal Security Service who inquired about his US citizenship, about what exactly he was doing in Russia and in the United States in terms of science, and whether he had a security clearance. "This could be a sign of the times," he says.

If the United States and other countries were to further restrict their visa policies, the isolation of Russian scientists will only increase, says Mikhail Feigel'man, a physicist at the Landau Institute of Theoretical Physics in Moscow. "That would be the most stupid step the West could take," he says. ■

Quirin Schiermeier, with additional reporting by Jeff Tollefson and Eric Hand

Physicists aflutter about data photographed at conference

An Italian-led research group's closely held data have been outed by paparazzi physicists, who photographed conference slides and then used the data in their own publications.

For weeks, the physics community has been buzzing with the latest results on 'dark matter' from a European satellite mission known as PAMELA (Payload for Antimatter Matter Exploration and Light-nuclei Astrophysics). Team members have talked about their latest results at several recent conferences (see *Nature* 454, 808; 2008), but beyond a quick flash of a slide, the collaboration has not shared the data. Many high-profile journals, including *Nature*, have strict rules about authors publicizing data before publication.

It now seems that some physicists have taken matters into their own hands. At least two papers recently appeared on the preprint server arXiv.org showing representations of PAMELA's latest findings (M. Cirelli *et al.* <http://arxiv.org/abs/0808.3867>; 2008, and L. Bergstrom *et al.* <http://arxiv.org/abs/0808.3725>; 2008). Both have recreated data from photos taken of a PAMELA presentation on 20 August at the Identification of Dark Matter conference in Stockholm, Sweden.

"We had our digital cameras ready," says Marco Cirelli, a theorist at the Institute of Theoretical Physics in Gif-sur-Yvette, France, and one of those who took pictures. The preprints fully acknowledge

the source of the data and reference the presentation photographed.

PAMELA has been attracting such interest because it has reportedly seen an excess of high-energy positrons in space. Those positrons could stem from the collision and annihilation of dark-matter particles, which could make up most of the mass of the Universe. If the data hold up, they would be the most direct clue yet to the nature of dark matter.

The satellite's finding comes at a time when theoretical physicists are desperate for dark-matter data to test their ideas against. "There hasn't been much progress," says Adam Falkowski, a theorist at CERN, Europe's particle-physics laboratory near Geneva, Switzerland. "The hunger for new results in the community is big."

Piergiorgio Picozza, PAMELA's principal investigator and a physicist at the University of Rome Tor Vergata, says he is "very, very upset" by the data being incorporated into a publication. But Cirelli maintains that he and others have done nothing wrong. "We asked the PAMELA people [there], and they said it was not a problem," he says.

Photography or videotaping of conference presentations is common in some fields, such as biology, but is relatively rare in physics. Falkowski says he can't recall another case. Still, he says, "I personally don't find anything wrong with it." ■

Geoff Brumfiel

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