

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

POLICY

Addictions institute

An addictions research institute merging two currently separate bodies of the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) “makes scientific sense”, NIH director Francis Collins declared on 18 November. Collins has asked a task force to produce a restructuring plan for the National Institute on Drug Abuse (budget: US\$1 billion) and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (budget: \$462 million) sometime in the summer of 2011. Scientists funded by the alcohol-research institute have opposed the move. See go.nature.com/col7bt for more.

Organ harvesting

An inquiry published on 16 November details how organs were illegally removed for testing from the dead bodies of nuclear workers in the United Kingdom between 1955 and 1992, without obtaining relatives’ consent in many cases. Medical officers who analysed the organs — in part for research on allowable radiation exposures — apparently did not consider the ethical implications of their work, although they did not conceal it, and did not fully appreciate the law, the Redfern Inquiry found. Regulations on the use of human tissues have been made more stringent in the past few years. See go.nature.com/ynaivp for more.

Oil-spill blame

An interim report by the US National Academy of Engineering and the National Research Council, part of the National Academies, lists a number of engineering and regulatory flaws that led to the explosion at BP’s Deepwater Horizon oil rig in the Gulf of



Seafood stewardship

A long-running debate about whether to classify an Antarctic fishery as ‘sustainable’ has concluded. The Antarctic toothfish (*Dissostichus mawsoni*, pictured) caught in the Ross Sea can now be sold with a Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) sustainability badge, after Moody Marine — the company based in Derby, UK, examining the status of the toothfish — addressed objections to its sustainability assessment. Some scientists have said that not enough is known about the toothfish to certify it as sustainable, and also argued that the MSC certification process failed to protect the environment and needed reform (see *Nature* 467, 28–29; 2010). Others have defended the MSC (see *Nature* 467, 531; 2010).

Mexico in April. The report, released on 16 November, noted that pivotal choices made during the drilling were intended to reduce costs and time — despite earlier findings by the White House oil-spill commission that firms did not cut corners to save money.

Biosecurity labs

Two planned US biosecurity labs have not yet been adequately vetted for safety, says the National Research Council (NRC). A report released on 15 November concludes that the US government’s latest safety assessment underestimates the

chances, as well as the impact, of an accidental pathogen release by the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility to be built in Manhattan, Kansas. On 18 November, a separate NRC committee criticized the methods used to gauge the risk to public safety posed by the National Emerging Infectious Diseases Laboratory, built in central Boston, Massachusetts, but not yet in operation.

Synthetic biology

An office within the White House should develop a clear and coordinated approach to US research in synthetic biology, and an

authoritative, independent body should challenge and correct sensational media claims about the topic. These were two of 19 provisional recommendations debated at a 17 November public meeting by a 13-member presidential commission studying ethical issues and the risks and benefits of synthetic biology. The commission expects to complete its report for President Barack Obama in mid-December. See go.nature.com/jp8bhk for more.

Climate bill killed

Canada’s Senate defeated the nation’s climate-change bill on 16 November, quashing legislation to cut greenhouse-gas emissions. The bill called for cuts in emissions of 25% below the 1990 level by 2020, and a long-term target of 80% by 2050. See go.nature.com/1qrprc for more.

Nuclear Korea

Three US scientists have reported being shown round a modern uranium-enrichment plant in Yongbyon, North Korea, earlier this month — a surprising display of the country’s expertise in nuclear technology. North Korea’s current weapons programme is based on plutonium. Siegfried Hecker, a former director of Los Alamos National Laboratory and now at Stanford University, California, said the facility seemed to be designed primarily for nuclear power generation — although it could be converted to produce highly enriched weapons-grade uranium.

BUSINESS

Pharma cuts

A number of big pharmaceutical companies announced restructuring plans last week. German chemicals giant Bayer,

CHENG/HOEFELING

headquartered in Leverkusen, said it would spend €1 billion (US\$1.4 billion) cutting 4,500 jobs — but also creating 2,500 positions in emerging markets — by the end of 2012. Novartis, based in Basel, Switzerland, headlined cost-cutting measures but gave no overall figures on costs or job cuts. And Basel-based rival Roche said it would cut 4,800 jobs (6% of its workforce) over two years and drop research into RNA interference (see page 487 for more).

Stem-cell trial

The second-ever clinical trial of a therapy involving human embryonic stem cells (ES cells) has received the green light from the US Food and Drug Administration. In phase I/II trials, Advanced Cell Technology in Marlborough, Massachusetts, will inject retinal cells derived from human ES cells into the eyes of 12 patients, to examine the safety of a therapy for Stargardt's macular degeneration, an inherited form of progressive juvenile blindness. See go.nature.com/v5sohq for more.

Lupus drug

A potential blockbuster drug to treat the autoimmune disease lupus looks likely to be approved in the United States. An advisory panel to the US Food and Drug

Administration (FDA) gave Benlysta (belimumab) the green light on 17 November despite concerns over side effects. The drug inhibits a protein that, in lupus, causes the body to produce antibodies attacking its own tissues. It was developed by Human Genome Sciences in Rockville, Maryland, in partnership with GlaxoSmithKline in London. Benlysta would be the first drug to be approved specifically to treat systemic lupus erythematosus for half a century. An FDA decision is expected in the next two weeks.

PEOPLE

Researcher resigns



Anil Potti (pictured), a researcher on cancer genetics at Duke University in Durham, North

Carolina, has resigned amid investigations into his alleged research misconduct. A letter from Huntington Willard, director of Duke's Institute for Genome Sciences and Policy, on 19 November said that Potti had accepted full responsibility for anomalies in data handling, analysis and management. Three clinical trials based on Potti's research were suspended and have been closed, and one

of his papers (D. Hsu *et al.* *J. Clin. Oncol.* 25, 4350–4357; 2007) was retracted last week.

FUNDING

ITER cost-cutting

Plans for savings to ITER, a roughly €15-billion (US\$20-billion) fusion reactor being built near Cadarache, France, have won political backing from the project's seven international partners. On 18 November, members of ITER's council endorsed plans to consolidate contracts and reduce staffing costs. The council also supported a plan to forgo full testing of some of the machine's massive superconducting magnets. All told, the plans will save more than €100 million, but Osamu Motojima, ITER's director-general, says that still more savings must be found.

Physics rescue

The world-renowned Erwin Schrödinger International Institute for Mathematical Physics in Vienna has been rescued from imminent closure after more than 200 international researchers wrote letters of support to the Austrian government. National cost-cutting threatened the institute's budget, but on 16 November, research minister Beatrix Karl promised to find extra cash for universities that

COMING UP

29 NOV–10 DEC

Delegates at this year's United Nations climate summit in Cancún, Mexico, hope to reinvigorate the negotiations that effectively stalled last year in Copenhagen. See page 489 for more. <http://cc2010.mx/en>

29 NOV–3 DEC

The Materials Research Society meets in Boston, Massachusetts. go.nature.com/zkg5rq

1 DECEMBER

Nominations are expected for the next head of the California Institute for Regenerative Medicine in San Francisco; Bob Klein, chairman of the state stem-cell agency, steps down this month.

integrate institutes. The University of Vienna snapped up Schrödinger — although the fate of dozens of other such non-university academic institutes in Austria remains uncertain. See go.nature.com/bb8esd for more.

European funding

The process of applying for research grants from Europe's Framework programme should be simplified, say leading researchers evaluating the current programme, which runs until 2013. Their report, published on 18 November, asks the European Commission to trust researchers more and to cut overly bureaucratic accounting regimes. It also says the Framework programme should fund more grants based on ideas from researchers, rather than those directed by the commission and politicians.

► NATURE.COM

For daily news updates see: www.nature.com/news

TREND WATCH

The scale of restrictions facing researchers who want UK visas has become slightly clearer. A temporary cap on visas is already in place; as *Nature* went to press, the government was reported to have decided to allow 43,000 highly skilled non-European Union migrants — who make up about a tenth of university staff (see chart) — to enter the country each year. This would be 13% fewer than in 2009, which is the lower limit of an advisory committee's recommendations last week of 13–25% cuts.

IMMIGRATION AT UK UNIVERSITIES

Around 16% of UK universities' science, engineering and technology staff are not from the European Union (2008–09).

