

alive on a respirator, when his transplant colleagues have patients desperately in need of kidneys. Salaman thought that a surgeon would be able to decide whether to turn off the respirator after forty-eight hours if the electroencephalogram recorded no brain activity. Some hopeless cases are kept on respirators much longer, although the practice is declining, Salaman said. Hudson, and the rest of the participants, agreed that there cannot be legislation to determine the time of death; this must remain the responsibility of the doctors concerned.

## MEDICAL RESEARCH

### MRC comes Clean

THE Medical Research Council has decided to take a leaf out of the Science Research Council's book by playing a few of its cards face upwards. The annual report of the MRC includes a statement of the policy which guides the council's support of university research, and it thus departs from the tradition set by previous reports which have advertised the past year's achievements but have not discussed the rationale behind the distribution of grants (HMSO, 9s). Another novel feature of the report, which marks the council's golden jubilee year, is that the directory of groups, units and individuals receiving support is being published separately.

Although the policy statement comes up with few real surprises, and the policy which guides research in the MRC's own establishments still remains to be formally stated, the publication of a list of disciplines which the council particularly wants to support is a healthy sign that the MRC is not just paying lip service to the ideal of making the universities more aware of the aims and methods of the council. The statement points out the necessity for selective allocation of public funds, and singles out mental disorder, arterial disease, population control and drug dependence as the chief problems to be tackled. And the disciplines which the MRC believes "for one reason or another need encouragement" are psychiatry, clinical neurology, obstetrics and gynaecology, dermatology, dentistry, virology and mycology.

The guiding light behind the MRC's support of university research is that it should be expected to provide "public benefits commensurate with the investment". And the council seeks to fulfil this task by supporting a broad base of research over a wide field of activity "in the hope of finding the unexpected and in order to build a foundation for future advance", as well as encouraging progress towards particular practical objectives. The chief tool used by the council is the short-term project grant, and long-term support is only given where there are good reasons why project grants will not suffice.

It is perhaps a tribute to the MRC's success in backing good horses—and there is plenty of evidence in the report which backs up its claim to support research with potential benefits—that the council has been allocated a healthy increase in its grant while other sciences are feeling the pinch. Last year the MRC spent more than £19 million, and that represents an increase of nearly 15 per cent over the previous year. Most of the finance came from parliamentary grants in aid, and the rest from individual ministries, trusts and foundations (see Table 1).

Table 1. INCOME AND EXPENDITURE 1966-70

Year	Parliamentary grant (£ million)	Increase over previous year (per cent)	Total expenditure (£ million)
1966-67	11.8	17.2	12.8
1967-68	13.8	16.3	14.9
1968-69	15.2	10.7	16.7
1969-70	17.6	15.5	19.1

The report also chronicles some administrative changes that have been made during the year. Three new units have been established—the Leukaemia Unit at Hammersmith Hospital, under the directorship of Dr D. A. G. Galton; the Unit for Physical Aids for the Disabled, under Dr D. C. Simpson; and the Lipid Metabolism Unit headed by Dr N. B. Myant—and two new divisions are to be created in the National Institute for Medical Research. These are the Division of Developmental Biology headed by Dr R. M. Gaze, and a Genetics Division under Dr R. Holliday.

There are also new arrangements for distributing fellowships and studentships. Instead of allocating block awards to heads of departments for distribution among suitably qualified candidates, the MRC now intends to allocate awards in the light of its own research priorities. The council will lay down guidelines for the number of awards to be allocated to particular subject areas, and the Training Awards Committee will distribute the quotas to various departments. A department's capacity to provide good research training will be the chief criterion for receipt of awards, and preference will be given for training in mycology, virology, developmental biology, clinical pharmacology and therapeutics, epidemiology and social medicine, psychiatry and clinical psychology, physical anthropology, bioengineering, dentistry, nutrition and parasitology.

## ENRICHED URANIUM

### The Riddle from Capetown

FEW clues have emerged to throw any light on the unexpected announcement last week by Dr Vorster, the South African Prime Minister, that the South African Atomic Energy Board has developed a "novel" process for the enrichment of uranium. No indication has appeared of the type of process involved and the motive of the South African Government in getting involved in enriched uranium production remains hardly less obscure.

On the face of it, the South African Atomic Energy Board has every reason to produce enriched uranium on its own territory. The republic has recently embarked on a nuclear power programme that will see 20,000 MW of nuclear capacity installed by the end of the century—more than three times that operating in Britain at present—and there will be ample demand for enriched uranium fuel. A site is already being cleared for the first 300 MW nuclear power plant just north of Capetown. Moreover, South Africa has the largest uranium deposits in the world, and the export trade could do even better in enriched uranium than in the concentrate sold at present.

But it is hard not to see the political expediency of such a move. Although the timing of the announcement, coinciding with the controversial arms deal