

correspondence

Canadian science

SIR,—In your issue of March 15, David Spurgeon offered his own interpretation of recently announced changes in the structure of federal scientific activities. After reading his article, I cannot avoid feeling that the author has done a disservice to Canadian scientists.

Spurgeon makes the statement that the press releases of the Ministry of State for Science and Technology served only to confuse in an attempt to provide more detail about the rather general statements made in the throne speech. I submit that he is guilty of that particular offence.

"The question in the minds of some", wrote Spurgeon, "was whether the ministry was finally becoming . . . an all-powerful, monolithic instrument of power in Canadian science policy". He went on to say that a quick sampling of reaction in the science community indicated that the ministry's releases had indeed given this impression. The sample must have been a very quick one because, following the release of the information kit, a survey of Canadian scientific opinion published in the daily press indicated that most of those surveyed were not prepared to condemn the changes out of hand but instead would wait for specific actions before passing judgment.

Spurgeon cites, as perhaps the most confusing element of the announcement, the failure of the ministry to mention anything about possible new reporting relationships for the granting councils. Surely Spurgeon is hung up on the administrative considerations he so vigorously condemns. Reporting relationships are simply provisions for accountability to Parliament. What is important to every scientist are factors such as peer assessment of research proposals, the allocation of funds to the granting councils and the input of the granting councils to the Inter-Council Coordinating Committee. All these factors were clearly dealt with in the ministry press releases. The reporting channels for the existing granting councils have not been altered.

Finally, Spurgeon questions the separation of the granting function of the National Research Council of Canada from the laboratory function. Such a separation, he says, will destroy a vital link between government research and industry. The changes proposed for the NRC affect only the

university granting mechanisms. The traditional liaison between the NRC and industry will continue.

Yours faithfully,
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Journals jungle

SIR,—I am writing in reference to the article "Science Journals in a Prices Jungle," which appeared in the *Nature* dated February 15, 1974. That article discussed price rises of a variety of journals and listed "a record-breaking increase" for *International Pharmaceutical Abstracts* of "261%". I must respond to this kind of reporting since not all the information was included; this makes the information that does appear misleading.

Prior to January, 1973, *IPA* had two subscription prices—an institutional subscription price of \$100.00 a year and a subscription price to individuals of \$40.00 a year. A two-subscription price system was difficult to administer since many people who should have paid \$100.00 were paying only \$40.00, and so on. We were faced with having to increase both rates since we were losing money in the situation that existed at that time. The expense of publishing *IPA* was increasing each year and that just could not be balanced by income at existing subscription rates. After a thorough study of our subscribers, we decided to change to one institutional subscription price of \$150.00 a year. The increase was from \$100.00 to \$150.00 and not quite as record breaking as the article implied. We felt, however, that we could not ignore the individual completely and therefore decided to offer an additional copy subscription rate of \$30.00 a year (if one subscription exists at the \$150.00 rate, as many additional copies as desired can be obtained at the \$30.00 rate).

Other facts relating to the change are that we improved and expanded the services offered. All our promotional pieces and literature at that time mentioned that we would be providing greater coverage, most abstracts, and that *IPA* would be more current. This in fact has happened, and in 1973 we published 13% more abstracts than we did in 1972 and *IPA* was on time. We did

follow through on our promises of additional services for the change in subscription price—it was not just a price change for the same service. One other fact that seems to have been completely overlooked is that *IPA* is still one of the lower priced secondary publications. Most abstracting-indexing publications are far more than \$150.00 a year. Possibly our real problem is that we began at too low a subscription price for *IPA* when it began.

Yours faithfully,

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Kidney transplants

SIR,—Why publish such a rank piece of scientific journalism as "Transplants: the failing machinery" (April 19, 1974)? The subject has always been an emotive one, but this is not an excuse for the lack of reason displayed and the dramatic aura with which the article is surrounded. To use comparisons between kidneys received from and contributed to the national donor pool as an indication of "reluctance . . . to share out kidneys which are not suitable for their own patients" is nonsense unless some measure of the kidneys potentially available within an institution by comparison with the size of its recipient pool is also given. Both St Mary's and Hammersmith are hospitals with a large transplant programme in areas where irremediable cranial trauma is rare. Further St Mary's does not have a neurosurgical service so that we see few patients with intracranial vascular accidents and such patients as we have with progressive primary intracranial malignant disease usually go elsewhere before they die. So we shall always be debtors rather than creditors.

Is there unequivocal evidence that "lack of understanding and cooperation between doctors . . . is largely to blame"? Of course, being human, we are too lazy, too hidebound and too hardworked always to do the right thing in complicated situations, but I do not know of data to suggest that a large number of kidneys are being lost through medical indifference.

Yours faithfully,

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