

Dr Rees's obvious attractions as director at Mill Hill include his combination of individual experience with his reputation as a scientist and his formidable reputation for getting on well with people.

Among the questions to be settled before an appointment can be offered are an appropriate salary — the director of Mill Hill has traditionally been a physician whose salary has been linked with those of medically qualified academics. There is also a question of the new director's freedom to make appointments of his own.

US agricultural aid

Balance for all

Washington

A report by the General Accounting Office (GAO), the investigative arm of the US Congress, criticizes the ability of US universities to carry out agricultural research and technical assistance relevant to the needs of Third World countries.

The report, recently published in Washington, focuses on the impact of legislation passed by Congress in 1975 which directed the Agency for International Development (AID) to find ways of strengthening and improving the involvement of US universities in solving the food problems of the developing nations. The action by Congress was meant to halt the decline in AID research grants to universities which had taken place in the early 1970s and covers projects totalling about \$400 million.

After a detailed assessment of the various initiatives taken under the new legislation, an amendment to Title XII of the Foreign Assistance Act, known as "Famine Prevention and Freedom from Hunger", the GAO concludes that progress in achieving its goal had been slow and in some cases virtually non-existent.

The debate over the relationship between AID, Third World needs and the US research community has considerable significance for US foreign policy. Increased assistance for agricultural research was one of the recommendations that won universal endorsement — including that of President Ronald Reagan — at October's summit meeting in Cancun, Mexico.

The Reagan-appointed administrators of AID, who see Title XII as providing a firm basis for switching the emphasis of foreign aid towards technical assistance, particularly in agricultural research, claim that parts of the GAO report create an impression "which seriously understates the very substantial progress made during the first five years of Title XII".

However, Mr Herbert L. Beckington, the agency's inspector general, commenting on a draft report, said that in general AID accepts its recommendations and intended to carry them out. And AID deputy administrator Mr Joseph Wheeler told a recent meeting of the Board for International Food and Agricultural Development that plans were already under way to issue a

policy directive clarifying the agency's commitment to the Title XII concept and to make implementation more effective.

AID officials emphasize that the legislation was originally intended to ensure that US universities with a tradition of agricultural research received adequate support to enable them to provide technical assistance to developing nations, a capability which they claim was eroded in the early 1970s as foreign-aid policy switched to commodity and credit agreements. They accept many of the criticisms of the way in which technical assistance programmes have worked out in practice. The GAO investigators, for example, found that many AID field missions distrusted teams sent out by US universities, claiming that members of such teams often lacked relevant experience of the problems they were meant to tackle.

The GAO report also criticizes the AID contract procedures in universities. In some cases, for example, it is claimed that the agency has taken up to two years to approve the award of a contract to a particular university. In addition, it says that the resource registry used to identify the best institutions and individual resources is not up to date, contains inadequate information and is cumbersome to use.

Supporters of Title XII within AID, who feel that their efforts to implement the legislation effectively received only lukewarm support from the Carter Administration, have generally welcomed the GAO report and hope that the new Administration will prove more sympathetic.

David Dickson

Drug regulation in Brazil

Troubles building

Rio de Janeiro

The inauguration last month of a new headquarters for Brazil's National Institute for Health Quality Control underlines the urgent need to bring order to the chaotic system of marketing pharmaceuticals in Brazil. Over the past ten years, Brazil has licensed on average 8,000 new brand names for drugs each year and the country is among the most liberal in the developing world for allowing the exploitation of pharmaceutical products.

Brazil now ranks sixth in the world for pharmaceutical sales, and the market is dominated by the multinational companies which lobby in Brasilia against tighter regulatory measures. Import licences are issued by the Ministry of Commerce which registered US \$5.5 million of "pharmaceutical drug imports" and \$300 million under the category "other pharmaceutical additives" during the first three months of 1981. Total sales last year amounted to almost \$2,000 million, or six times the amount spent for all public health programmes in the country.

Last month Brazil's president, General

Figueiredo, opened a new \$5 million seven-point star-shaped building for the National Institute for Health Quality Control and its director, Eduardo Peixoto, outlined the institute's main role — that of "moderating the free flow of licensing of pharmaceutical products in Brazil". Such steps are clearly needed, but the institute's predecessor, the National Secretariat for Health Vigilance (SNVS), given the responsibility for registering and controlling drugs six years ago, did not set a good precedent. Its Central Control Laboratory functioned for three years with only two technicians, at the end of which time it received its new name — and now after a further three years, a new building.

In the absence of effective controls, Brazil's pharmaceutical industry has gone on expanding despite the general economic recession, with the biggest growth area being psychotherapeutic drugs. Almost all drugs can be sold over the counter in any pharmacy without a prescription and the average consumption per person is several times greater than in developed countries.

One of the most alarming problems is the indiscriminate use of antibiotics. Antibiotics are routinely bought to treat colds, and with six of the ten best-selling drug products being antibiotics there have been many examples of falsification by private laboratories and distributors. The Maerson Laboratory of São Paulo was providing hospitals with "zircillin" and "ampicillin" capsules which in fact contained pure starch. And in Rio de Janeiro, after a series of complaints from consumers, Roche Laboratories discovered that their Bactrim balsam had been the victim of large-scale falsification by distributors and that several Rio pharmacies were selling an adulterated product diluted to half its normal concentration. A further abuse of antibiotics came to light last November when the respected Adolfo Lutz Institute of Biology confirmed the accusation made by the president of the Pharmaceutical Association of São Paulo that the milk sold in São Paulo contained antibiotics used as preservatives.

In a recent report, Dr Carlyle Guerra de Macedo, a consultant to the World Health Organization, denounced the "inefficiency of official controls which permits the marketing of many dangerous drugs". Many drugs are still available in Brazil, even with no prescription, long after they have been prohibited in the United States. And many of the products on sale contain no warnings about the possible harmful effects of abuse. These problems are further complicated by the fact that in many pharmacies the staff are inadequately trained and know little about the products they sell.

The list of faults in the Brazilian way of marketing drugs is extensive, and the revitalized National Institute for Health Quality Control faces a daunting task.

Maurice Bazin