

Institute for Cancer Research

Slimmed down but healthy

WITH the opening last week of a new £500,000 drug development laboratory at Sutton, in Surrey, the Institute for Cancer Research (ICR) has taken a magic step towards the radical restructuring initiated three years ago by its then-new director, Dr Robin Weiss.

As a result of an 18 per cent cut in funding in 1977, Weiss inherited a £1 million deficit which is being made good by a programme of staff reductions and "retrenchment". A research station at Pollards Wood, in Buckinghamshire, will be closed next year, leaving the institute's activities concentrated at its Sutton site and at the Chester Beatty Research Laboratories in Chelsea, London.

The new laboratory, directed by Professor A.B. Foster, is named after the Cancer Research Campaign, which made capital grants of £900,000 for the building and for improvements to the laboratories at Chelsea. It will house ICR's Drug Development Section, which was formerly split between Sutton and Chelsea, and enable closer collaboration with the Sutton branch of the Royal Marsden Hospital. ICR's Chemical Carcinogenesis Section, headed by Dr Peter Brookes, will move to Sutton from Pollards Wood next year and Dr Julian Peto of the Imperial Cancer Research Fund's epidemiology unit in Oxford will head the ICR epidemiology unit at Sutton from October. The animal breeding centre at Pollards Wood will be run down, and arrangements for the supply of experimental animals have been made with the Medical Research Council.

Weiss's main innovation at ICR has been to expand basic research in cell and molecular biology, which was poorly represented before 1980 and is the subject of important recent developments. With newly-refurbished laboratories, the Cell and Molecular Biology Section is studying human oncogenes and tumour viruses.

Plans are well advanced to supplement those studies with a major new unit devoted to the study of human leukaemia and wholly supported by the Leukaemia Research Fund. Dr Mel Greaves, head of the membrane immunology laboratory at the Imperial Cancer Research Fund, is expected to direct the new unit.

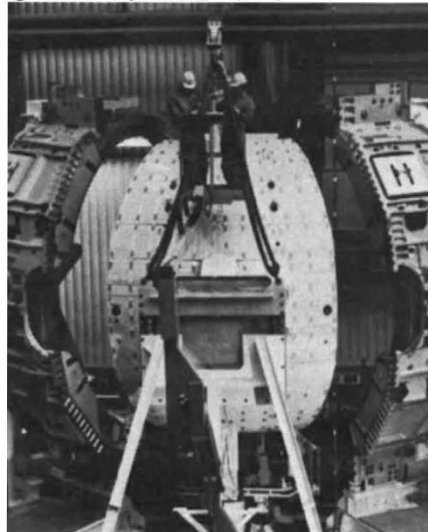
The main casualties of Weiss's restructuring have been tumour immunology, which will continue but on a reduced scale, and radiobiology. Fundamental research in this area has been discontinued, and many of the staff have moved with Professor G.E. Adams to the Medical Research Council's radiobiology unit at Harwell. The teaching role of the institute, as part of the British Postgraduate Medical Federation, has been strengthened with the appointment of Professor G. Westbury to the newly-established chair of surgery. The Cancer Research Campaign has appointed

Dr Tim McElwain to its chair of medical oncology at ICR, and the Medical Research Council has increased its support for this area.

Weiss feels the new slimmed-down ICR, which now has a total staff of 410 compared with 470 three years ago, will maintain its pre-eminent position in those areas where it is best known. New funding arrangements mean ICR now has to compete for research grants from a joint committee of its main sources of support, the Cancer Research Campaign and the Medical Research Council.

Weiss says the new system has provided stability which had been lacking. He points out that the Drug Development Section of the institute has probably introduced more anticancer drugs than any other unit in the world. Two drugs in particular are causing excitement at present: one, known as CB3717, is an enzyme inhibitor which although only in phase I of clinical trials is showing potential for use against cancers of the breast and ovary and could in time become a less toxic alternative to methotrexate. The other, CBDCA, is a non-toxic platinum derivative now in phase II of clinical trials. The section is also continuing its pioneering work on antibody-toxin conjugate therapy, using monoclonal antibodies to target the α subunit of chlorambucil, a widely used antitumour drug, onto *in vitro* bone marrow cells. **Tim Beardsley**

JET takes off



EUROPE'S £175 million attempt to create the conditions for the thermonuclear fusion of deuterium and tritium, the Joint European Torus or JET, circulated its first plasma (of normal hydrogen) on Saturday 25 July. JET, a tokamak, is pictured above towards the end of its five-year construction, which was completed on time and "within a few per cent" of costs envisaged in 1975, the JET team says. □

Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory

Uncertain times for revival

Berkeley, California

ALTHOUGH the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory's (LBL's) proposal to be the home for a new National Center for Advanced Materials (NCAM) continues to take a beating, it remains the heart of the laboratory's hopes for holding its own in staff and funds. For the latest of a series of studies of the national laboratories, soon to be released by the White House Science Council, is expected once again to call on the laboratories to focus on a more defined mission, more attuned to national needs—a criticism that NCAM is planned to meet.

The recent history of LBL leaves no doubts why NCAM is so important for the laboratory. While many of the other national laboratories were able to cushion the blow of reduced base funding by having single, large projects that could not be abandoned, LBL's diversity left it vulnerable. Over the past two years, LBL has lost 19 per cent of its staff. Ironically, the close association with the University of California's Berkeley campus that has made LBL perhaps the most scientifically solid of the national laboratories (LBL director David Shirley points with pride to the 30 National Academy of Sciences members on his staff) is also responsible for the diversity.

NCAM, when fully operational, would bring the staff and budget of LBL's basic energy sciences division up to a full one-third of the total laboratory. The laboratory employs 4,000 people (2,500 full-time equivalents) with an operating budget of \$110 million. "If we get the support for NCAM," Shirley said in an interview here last week, "we can at best hold the line." The problem is that the plan for NCAM has come under attack. First, materials scientists complained that the proposal was spirited into the President's 1984 budget without sufficient peer review. More recently, the House of Representatives voted to kill all appropriations for the project.

Shirley presses his case for NCAM not only as a salvation for LBL, but also as a model of "serious" efforts to respond to the criticisms of the national laboratories' lack of focus and inattention to national needs. "There is a tendency to lose sight of the necessary coupling between support of research by the federal government and the requirement that research address national needs. NCAM is meant to address these problems—I was not aiming to get a piece of an existing pie, I was aiming to get a bigger pie", he said.

He added that critics of NCAM who claim that it was not peer-reviewed "don't understand the process by which research is supported". He asked a rhetorical question of those critics: "Where were you when we were laying off 19 per cent of our