

Cancer research

Direct-mail medicine criticized*Washington*

A NEW organization created to raise funds in the United States for studies of diet, nutrition and cancer is coming under fire for spending only a small proportion of the millions collected through direct-mail solicitations on actual research. The American Institute for Cancer Research, founded in 1981 by two professional fundraisers in the Washington area, took in some \$3.5 million during its first fiscal year ending September 1983, while awarding only \$400,000 in research grants.

According to a financial disclosure filed with New York State on 16 April this year, \$600,000 was spent on public education and \$2.4 million on fund-raising. And a report issued last month by the Council of Better Business Bureaus (BBB), an independent group that monitors charities and investigates consumer complaints, revealed that \$893,000 of the institute's fund-raising expenditure went to the firm owned by the institute's founders, Jerry Watson and Chat Hughey.

The BBB report concluded that the institute failed to meet its standards for charitable solicitations, which require that at least half of the funds raised be applied to the programmes described in the organization's public appeals. The BBB standards also require that the organization should have an independent governing body.

Since the end of the fiscal year, the institute has made some changes to correct these deficiencies, notably by amending its by-laws to restrict the founders' rights to appoint or remove directors of the institute.

A spokeswoman for the institute said that New York State, which has the strictest disclosure laws in the country, included under "fund-raising" close to a million dollars in expenditures that the institute considers to be "public education" activities, such as the printing of newsletters. According to an audit commissioned by the institute itself, only 37 per cent of its receipts went on fund raising. The New York rules consider an activity such as mailing a newsletter to be fund-raising if it is combined with an appeal for funds and if fund-raising is the "primary purpose".

The direct-mail pieces that the institute is continuing to send out, however, have raised the hackles of many scientists, the American Cancer Society and, according to a report in the *Los Angeles Times*, the state attorney general's office in California. More than 11 million copies of a "Census on Diet and Cancer" were sent out, which combines on a single page questions such as "what vitamin supplements do you take?", "do you eat red meat at least three times a week?" and "have you ever had cancer?" with a "contri-

but ion reply" that offers the opportunity to make a tax-deductible contribution. Respondents are asked to tick a box that reads: "I agree! It's absolutely essential to do extensive research in the area of diet and cancer — especially now when it's estimated that 50 per cent of all cancer is diet-related."

The institute's spring 1984 newsletter quotes letters from enthusiastic donors, including such comments as "unfortunately medical schools appear to completely overlook (*sic*) the importance of proper nutrition in maintaining good health" and "I firmly believe . . . that many illnesses can be prevented, halted, and even cured by proper diet".

Dr Colin Campbell, a Cornell University biochemistry professor who served on the National Academy of Sciences panel on diet and cancer, was named senior scientific adviser to the institute last December. He acknowledges that the "census" continues to make him "uncomfortable" and that it is of virtually no scientific value. He said he had told the institute staff that it was unacceptable but had rewritten the questions to make them "neutral" at least. He said he had also rewritten a cover letter to make it less "scary" and more positive in tone, and the institute's fundraisers had agreed to try it, although he said they had told him they were not sure it would work. The original letter had said

"Cancer can strike you, your parents, your brothers and sisters — anyone".

Campbell said he had instituted a new process for reviewing grant applications modelled on that used by the National Institutes of Health study sections, and was taking steps to advertise the availability of grants. Until now, the availability of the funds had been spread only by word of mouth. Although the institute does not release the names of its seven-member review panel, a list obtained by *Nature* confirmed Campbell's assurances that they are all reputable research scientists.

Campbell said he felt it unfair to judge the institute harshly on its performance during its first year of operation. The spokeswoman said the institute hopes to disburse 20 per cent of its funds in research grants this year. And she cited as an example of the institute's activity in public education the mailing of 20,000 copies of the National Academy report to physicians and the distribution of one million cards on breast self-examination for women.

In addition to the \$400,000 in grants made last year, a further \$700,000 had been committed and is being paid out, according to Campbell. Campbell's new review panel met in March and approved a further nine research proposals. The largest recipients of the awards made last year were the Linus Pauling Institute (\$70,000), the American Health Foundation (\$50,000) and Theodore Krontiris of Tufts University (\$50,000). Three members of the scientific panel, including Campbell, have also received grants. **Stephen Budiansky**

NIH to bolt the stable door*Washington*

A NEW study by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) has recommended tighter procedures at their clinical research centres to prevent a recurrence of the Darsee affair. Dr John Darsee, who had been widely regarded as a brilliant young medical researcher at both Emory University and later at Harvard University, was found to have repeatedly fabricated research results.

The NIH study of Darsee's activities at the Emory General Clinical Research Center, one of 75 such centres supported by NIH, concluded that trainees should be supervised more closely and that co-authors of scientific publications should be required to accept responsibility, in writing, for the papers.

The study offered no recommendations specifically for Emory, noting that the university had taken action on its own to prevent a repetition following its internal investigation of the Darsee affair. A major weakness cited by the NIH investigation was the absence of procedures at Emory at the time to detect Darsee's unauthorized inclusion of faculty members as co-authors on his many publications and abstracts — and the failure of even witting co-authors

to detect anything suspicious about Darsee's research results. The investigators were told that although the chairman of the department of medicine at Emory did routinely review all manuscripts produced by the department, his review was "primarily intended to insure that supporting grants and services are acknowledged correctly".

The recommendation for closer supervision of trainees arose from the investigators' discovery that the Emory faculty members with whom Darsee collaborated each assumed that another faculty member was supervising Darsee's clinical studies. The NIH study recommends the naming for each young investigator of a single supervisor who would be expected to review regularly the trainee's clinical studies, including raw data.

The NIH investigation was conducted by Drs Evelyn Hess (University of Cincinnati), Darryl DeVivo (Columbia/Presbyterian Medical Center) and James Freston (University of Connecticut). Its recommendations are now being considered by the NIH Division of Research Resources, which administers the clinical research centres.

Stephen Budiansky