

ty" among US servicemen and their families. A full reading of the report would show that the committee struggled with this idea throughout. Differences in exposure levels between the test types were explained in detail and an expert in risk communication was consulted in an attempt to reduce potential anxieties and fears. These efforts were balanced against the desire voiced by veterans to know what had happened to them and to end decades-long doubts about the causes of their health problems. The committee clearly states that not all the veterans' questions could be answered on the basis of rigorous scientific analysis. Yet, the veterans who have contacted the committee (now well over the 250 cited in the report) seem most grateful that their experience, so long ignored and denied, was finally affirmed.

David P. Rall

(Committee Chair)

Constance M. Pechura

(Study Director)

*Institute of Medicine (FO3036),
2101 Constitution Avenue, NW,
Washington, DC 20418, USA*

Fidia and neuroscience

SIR — In the press coverage concerning the falterings of the Fidia Pharmaceutical Corporation in Italy (*Nature* 364, 562; 1993) and the financial fall-out threatening the viability of the Fidia Georgetown Institute for the Neurosciences (FGIN), the most important dimension seems to have been overlooked.

Lost somewhere between enumerations of broken promises and legal battles are the significant human resources that define the FGIN. This institute, under the directorship of Professor Erminio Costa, is comprised of our fellow faculty and scientific colleagues, who, since the institute's inception in 1985, have dramatically enriched the intellectual and academic environment at Georgetown University. The invaluable contributions of these eminent scientists should not be reduced to a price tag or a percentage of a budget.

As faculty members of various departments at Georgetown, we have benefited in many ways from our collaboration with members of FGIN. This special relationship has attracted students and faculty. The research conducted by this group has enhanced our research programmes and resulted in the initiation of several new projects funded by the National Institutes of Health. FGIN has trained students and scientists from less wealthy countries, inspiring us to follow suit. Dollars cannot measure what we have gained by the growth and development of the FGIN in our midst. Nor can money mea-

sure what we stand to lose if this group of neuroscientists is not given the support and encouragement necessary for them to continue at our university.

Karen Gale

on behalf of 33 members of the faculty
*Georgetown University Medical Center,
3900 Reservoir Road NW,
Washington, DC 20007-2195, USA*

SIR — Your brief account of the troubles of the Italian pharmaceutical company Fidia was unfair with respect to the support it has given to basic neuroscience. I do not wish to defend the actions of the Italian government, and clearly Fidia Pharmaceuticals has made managerial mistakes for which they are paying, but to refer to the Fidia-sponsored programme of scientific conferences, travel grants, prizes to established and young scientists, training of postdoctoral fellows (as in my case) and the establishment of laboratories in Washington DC as "eyebrow-raising largesse" and worse still "a rat to be smelled out" is not nice. Indeed Fidia has spent more money (as percentage of turnover) on research and development than any other European pharmaceutical company, largely supporting basic research (see *Nature* 361, 765–768; 1993). Fidia's fall-out should be seen with sadness rather than derision.

Stefano Casalotti

*Neuro-behavioural Biology Center,
Mahidol University, Salaya,
Nakorn Pathom 73170,
Thailand*

SIR — We are concerned that your article may give the impression that, following a lawsuit by Georgetown University against Fidia over a reimbursement due in 1995 for the construction of a research building, the university has decided to retaliate by closing the Institute of Neuroscience (FGIN). We believe that such a move would greatly damage relations between universities and industry.

Although your report states that FGIN represents only 10 per cent of Georgetown's spending on neuroscience, the importance and impact of the contributions made by FGIN dwarf any other results that the university may have obtained with the remaining 90 per cent of neuroscience research spending. One might conclude that the size of investment does not always guarantee the quality of science, but it is the latter that counts.

The FGIN achievements have been assessed by an *ad hoc* committee selected last year by the university to carry out a periodical in-depth review of the institute's scientific activities. The committee, consisting of A. J. Aguayo (president), S. F. Heinemann, K. Fuke, H. Mohler and E. M. Johnson, prepared a positive and laudatory report. Moreover, in a survey in *Nature* of industry-sponsored activities in

US universities (361, 765–768; 1993) the institute's activities were evaluated positively. Surprisingly, your article states that FGIN will not survive, which contrasts with a report on the same topic that appeared almost simultaneously in *The Lancet* (14, 625; 1993).

The report of the peer-review committee on FGIN includes a list of 232 papers from FGIN published in peer-reviewed journals during its eight-year existence. There is evidence for impressive training activities (18 PhDs, 56 postdocs). Moreover, 25 scientists have spent sabbatical leaves at the institute.

We do not believe that your statements on FGIN's future reflects the thinking of the university leadership in view of the scientific and monetary benefits the university has received from FGIN. In our view, your leading article damages the scientific image of an institute that includes highly respected neuroscientists.

Giorgio Bernardi (President, Italian Society of Neuroscience); **Giovani Biggio** (Chairman, Department of Experimental Biology, University of Cagliari); **Vittorio Erspamer** (Professor Emeritus of Pharmacology, University of Rome); **Walter Fratta** (Chairman, Department of Neuroscience, University of Cagliari); **Gian Luigi Gessa** (Professor of Neuropsychopharmacology, University of Cagliari); **Paolo Mantegazza** (Rector, University of Milan); **Flavio Moroni** (Professor of Pharmacology, University of Florence); **Giancarlo Pepeu** (Chairman, Department of Pharmacology, University of Florence)

■ In August, a spokesperson for Georgetown University said that the future of the Fidia-Georgetown Institute for Neuroscience was "questionable" if, as was considered likely, Fidia failed to honour its contract to help pay for its promised \$30 million share of the cost of new premises for the institute. The spokesperson says that the outlook has improved since then, and that "a new version of the institute may be constituted" when the financial reorganization of Fidia in Italy is complete. — Editor, *Nature*. □

No need to write

SIR — Hermann Bondi (*Nature* 365, 484; 1993) deduces by a clear and simple argument that "the human mind is singularly liable to be mistaken on religious issues", and observes that "the variety of religions is a calamitously divisive force in human affairs". To anybody brought up in Northern Ireland, this conclusion and observation have been so self-evident that we had never (previously) realized that it merited a letter to *Nature*. *Res ipsa loquitur*.

Mark Cantley

*131 rue Verbiot,
B-1030 Brussels, Belgium*