

Genetic testing outside research acceptable, says cancer society

Washington. The American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) has split with other prominent biomedical research bodies by announcing in the May issue of the *Journal of Clinical Oncology* that genetic testing need not be confined to research settings.

The society, whose 10,000 members are all cancer specialists, says that testing for mutations predisposing to cancer should be made available to selected patients "as part of the preventive oncologic care of families". ASCO says that testing should be performed "to the greatest extent possible" as part of long-term outcome studies. But, it adds, "all individuals at hereditary risk for cancer should have access to appropriate genetic testing".

In contrast, organizations such as the National Advisory Council for Human Genome Research, the American Society of Human Genetics, and the National Breast Cancer Coalition have urged that genetic testing be confined to research settings. Frances Visco, for example, the president of the National Breast Cancer Coalition, says in the same journal that breast cancer advocates need the medical community to recognize "the need to do less, rather than more". □

More vaccine research urged

London. Although new viruses such as Ebola, Hanta and Dangué have emerged with alarming regularity in recent few years, little is being spent on vaccine research, according to Donald A. Henderson, director of the Smallpox Eradication Campaign at the World Health Organization. Mankind's survival in an increasingly populated and well-travelled world requires that funds be made available rapidly to develop vaccines against emerging viruses, he said last week.

Addressing a meeting at London's Royal Society held on the

bicentenary of the first use by Edward Jenner of cowpox as a vaccine against smallpox, Henderson pointed out that vaccines were most needed in poorer countries, but that few national research authorities in the developed world were willing to support medical research which does not directly benefit their own citizens. "Resources are not the problem; it is our priorities which are," he said. □

Neuroscience facilities opened

London. Representing one of the most important investments in British neuroscience for many years, the Wellcome Department of Cognitive Neurology and the Leopold Muller Functional Imaging Laboratory in London were officially opened last month by Sir Andrew Huxley, the physiologist and Nobel laureate.

The building, part of the Institute of Neurology in London's Queen's Square, has been financed through a £20-million (US\$30-million) grant from the Wellcome Trust. The Leopold Functional Imaging Laboratory is supported by a £3.6-million endowment from the trustees of the Leopold Muller Estate. □

New fellowships for Stanford

San Francisco. In an effort to reduce its dependence on federal funding and remain attractive to good graduate students, Stanford University in California has announced that it is to fund up to 300 graduate fellowships in the sciences and engineering. The graduate fellowship programme, launched with a \$10-million start-up fund, is intended to free students to pursue their interests at Stanford without the need to rely on federal research grants.

Gerhard Casper, president of Stanford, says he hopes to raise \$200 million to sustain the graduate fellowships, which would equal roughly half Stanford's federally funded research assistantships.

According to Charles Kruger, vice-provost and dean of research and graduate policy, the fellowship programme is intended to



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provide students with greater flexibility in choosing a field of research and a faculty adviser. A donation of \$15 million by Peter Bing, an alumnus and former trustee, will allow the university to hire 20 tenure-track faculty members. □

Rice bodies stick together

London. Representatives from agricultural research institutes in ten rice-growing countries in Asia established a Council for Partnership on Rice Research in Asia (CORRA) at a recent meeting at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in Manila, Philippines.

Besides strengthening partnership among rice research institutes and links with other agriculture research institutions, the council aims to seek support from 'donors' and to develop regional approaches for research in rice. □

May wins Crafoord prize

Stockholm. The 1996 Crafoord prize, awarded by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences and worth \$500,000, has been won by Robert M. May, professor of zoology at the University of Oxford, and currently chief scientific adviser to the British government.

The prize is awarded annually for fields outside the scope of the Nobel foundation. It goes to May for his contributions to "the bio-sciences with particular emphasis on ecology", especially his work on theoretical aspects. May says he is "exceedingly delighted", both on his own behalf, and that of British ecological community. □

French researchers protest

Paris. Researchers at France's agricultural research organization, INRA, were due to hold a day of protest this week over a new four-year 'contract' to be signed between the government and the agency, linking its activities more closely to economic and social goals.

Labour representatives claim that the terms of the contract will reduce INRA to a consultancy to the agro-food industry, and reduce its emphasis on research. But Bernard Chevassus-Au-Louis, director-general of the agency, argues that INRA has always been an applied research organization. The new agreement, he says, will merely update the agency's aims, bringing them more into line with the needs of French agriculture, and will not reduce the importance that it gives to research. □

Smog 'kills 60,000 a year'

Washington. Smog kills nearly 60,000 US citizens a year, according to a report from the Natural Resources Defence Council. The Washington-based group found that tiny airborne particles, mostly from cars and lorries, combine with ozone as temperatures rise, to produce photochemical smog, killing as many as 9,000 people in Southern California and 6,000 people in Los Angeles every year.

The report is based on five years' pollution data for 239 American cities and a study by the American Cancer Society. It points out that smog, which affects the elderly and children with asthma, is "the most pressing public health issue" facing federal policy-makers. □

Keck telescope joins its twin

Washington. The Keck II telescope was officially dedicated last week, joining its five-year-old twin, Keck I, on the summit of Mauna Kea in Hawaii. Following a test period, observations with the 10-metre telescope will begin in October, and new spectrographic instruments will be installed next year.

Already the world's largest optical telescope, Keck II's resolution will be further increased in 1998, when an adaptive optics system is due to be installed. Keck managers also plan for Keck I and II to be eventually used together as an interferometer, making them equivalent to an 85-metre telescope in resolving power. □

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