



PolicyPlayback

Sept
21

The US National Institutes of Health (NIH) announced it would begin accepting requests for human embryonic **stem cell** lines for use in federally funded research. It also made public the creation of a new committee, the Working Group for Human Embryonic Stem Cell Eligibility Review, which will advise the NIH director.

Sept
21

On the heels of increased scrutiny of drugmakers' influence on **continuing medical education** programs for doctors, pharmaceutical giant GlaxoSmithKline reportedly said that from 2010 it would continue to fund such programs but stop funding those offered by commercial providers.

Sept
21

A report from the US Government Accountability Office (GAO) stated that a single federal entity should be responsible for overseeing compliance at—and the creation of—**biocontainment labs**, which handle dangerous pathogens.

Sept
22

Figures from a GAO report highlighted by *The New York Times* indicated that NIH managers are increasingly bypassing the advice of scientific review panels when awarding funding. The fraction of **grants** awarded to individual researchers as such exceptions rose from 10% in 2003 to 19% in 2007, the most recent year for which figures are available.

Sept
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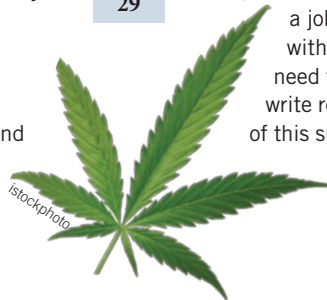
The US National Research Council and Institute of Medicine called for the creation of a “globally controlled system” to monitor in animals **emerging diseases** that threaten to jump the species boundary and infect humans. Additionally, the report from the institutes said that the director general of the World Organization for Animal Health should possess the power to declare animal health emergencies.

Sept
28

A random survey of 1,255 Australians—11% of whom said they'd been diagnosed with cancer—found that the vast majority wanted to hear about expensive **new drugs**, even if these medications were unsubsidized (*J. Clin. Oncol.* doi:10.1200/JCO.2009.22.7793; 2009).

Sept
29

An alternative weekly newspaper in Denver, Colorado, *Westword*, posted a job ad for someone with a certified medical need for **marijuana** to write reviews of samples of this substance for the publication on a freelance basis.



Sept
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US President Barack Obama announced that \$5 billion of the \$10.4 billion in economic stimulus **funding** set aside for the NIH half a year ago had been awarded to support medical research and upgrading laboratory capacity.

Oct
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Voluntary **clinical trial guidelines** set forth by the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America went into effect. The guidelines say, among other things, that researchers should not participate directly in a clinical trial involving a drug when they have an ownership stake in the product.

Oct
1

'Academic doping'—the use of drugs such as methylphenidate (Ritalin) and amphetamine (Dexedrine) to perform test scores—occurs among 25% of students at some US college campuses, wrote Vince Cakic of the University of Sydney's psychology department. In an article, Cakic put forth the idea that this trend could mean that, in the future, students will face routine doping tests before college exams (*J. Med. Ethics* **35**, 611–615; 2009).

Oct
6

Computing giant IBM said it was developing a silicon-based 'DNA transistor' chip, which it added could ultimately help “improve throughput and reduce cost to achieve the vision of **personalized genome analysis** at a cost of \$100 to \$1,000.”

Oct
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The **Nobel Prize** in Chemistry went to three researchers—Venkatraman Ramakrishnan, Ada Yonath and Thomas Steitz—for their insights into the structure of the ribosome. Two days earlier, the prize for biology went to another trio of scientists—Elizabeth Blackburn, Jack Szostak and Carol Greider—who characterized the DNA-preserving enzyme telomerase.



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The World Health Organization said that it might take several years before it lowers the threat level of the **H1N1** virus from a pandemic, the highest level, to seasonal-like virus.

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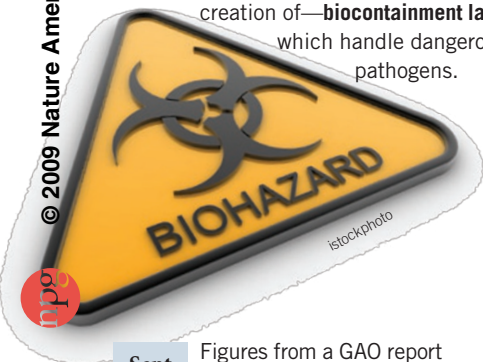
The *New England Journal of Medicine* was one of the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors member publications to detail new **conflict-of-interest** disclosure requirements. The requirements, to be phased in over the next half year, go beyond previous rules to ask details about financial relationships involving spouses and nonfinancial conflicts of interest (*N. Engl. J. Med.* doi:10.1056/nejme0909052; 2009).

Oct
14

British science journalist **Simon Singh**, who had a libel case brought against him by the British Chiropractic Association for a critical article he wrote in *The Guardian* newspaper, was granted permission to appeal an earlier decision in favor of the association.

Oct
14

After reviewing studies on **smoking bans**, which found a link between these rules and a reduction in heart attack rates by 6% to 47%, the Institute of Medicine released a report concluding that such bans have beneficial effect on health.





ResearchRewind

Sept
24

Results were released from an **HIV vaccine** trial in Thailand, which was hailed as a major milestone. Of the 16,000 trial participants, 74 in the placebo arm became HIV infected, whereas only 51 in the vaccinated group did.

Sept
28

An analysis of historical data reached the counterintuitive conclusion that **life expectancy** in the US actually rose about six years during the Great Depression—from 57.1 in 1929 to 63.3 in 1932—though researchers are not sure why (*Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA*, doi:10.1073/pnas.0904491106; 2009)



Oct
2

Using RNA interference and genome-wide mapping techniques, scientists discovered that the expression of a single protein in mosquitoes called TEP1 can influence whether these insects will succumb to the **malaria** parasite or live to pass it on (*Science* **326**, 147–150; 2009).

Oct
5

A study reviewing data from 329 pregnant women taking antidepressants known as **selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors** (SSRIs) found that they gave birth about five days earlier, on average, than their 51,770 control counterparts who had no history of mental illness (*Arch. Pediatr. Adolesc. Med.* **163**, 949–954; 2009).

Oct
6

A review of Swedish census data revealed that the education level of a man's wife was more important than his own in determining his **longevity**. More education translated into longer life (*Epidemiol. Community Health*, doi:10.1136/jech.2009.089623; 2009).

Oct
2

At the North American Menopause Society meeting in San Diego, researchers from the University of Pittsburgh presented findings from a study of more than 400 women aged between 42 and 52 that suggested a link between **hot flashes** and arterial plaques, which could increase the risk of heart attack.



Oct
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A close analysis of a **breast cancer** biopsy from a patient and a secondary tumor that appeared nine years later found 19 new mutations present in the DNA from the latter sample. Researchers hope that charting this evolution of the breast cancer could lead to treatment insights (*Nature* **461**, 809–813; 2009).



Oct
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The presence of the retrovirus XMRV (xenotropic murine leukemia virus-related virus) was detected in blood samples from 68 out of 101 people with **chronic fatigue syndrome**, or 67%—suggesting a possible link between the virus and the disease. By comparison, the virus was only detected in eight out of the 218 healthy controls, or roughly 4% (*Science*, doi:10.1126/science.1179052; 2009).



Oct
12

A 28-year-old woman who died from leukemia a month after giving birth seems to have **passed on cancer** to her newborn, who had a leukemic tumor trapped in a cheek, according to cell biologists (*Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. USA*, doi:10.1073/pnas.0904658106; 2009). The case offers evidence that cancers can pass from mother to fetus.