

ernment regulations, which make it possible to send reagents across borders; improved communication systems, and the globalization of scientific research.

Belfast will also pilot the NCI's multi-million dollar clinical trials information system, which will become available to all academic institutions in 2001. "Ireland has just the right size popula-

tion—around 5 million—to benefit from this," says Liu, "France and Germany, for example, would be too big in terms of population for clinical trials to progress quickly. And real value only comes from quick implementation of clinical trial knowledge into medical practice."

KAREN BIRMINGHAM, LONDON

India hopes for patriotic return of neuroscientists

India is to invest \$17 million over five years in its new National Brain Research Centre (NBRC), which was formally opened on 1 October, to make it a world class neuroscience facility. The NBRC is now trying to foster links with international neuroscience institutes and is appealing to expatriate Indian scientists to take part in the venture.

Richard Nakamura, deputy director of the US National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), who led a delegation to the NBRC in New Delhi last month, has signed a collaborative agreement with the center, as has the Brain Science Institute at Japan's Institute of Physical and Chemical Research (RIKEN). A similar agreement with the UK Medical Research Council is anticipated.

"These deals will focus primarily on the training of Indian scientists for joint research projects," Manju Sharma, secretary to the Department of Biotechnology, which is funding the center, told *Nature Medicine*. Specific protocols will be designed at a joint workshop later this year.

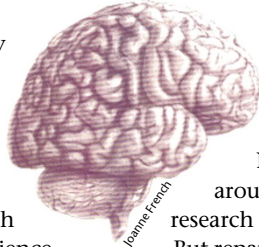
"Our aim," says NBRC program coordinator Vijayalakshmi Ravindranath, who is slated to become its director, "is to catch

up with the international neuroscience field." In next five years she envisions the NBRC as a state-of-art institute with a scientific staff of 200. T.R. Raju, head of neurophysiology at the National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences, Bangalore, whose division is networked

with the NBRC, says that the NBRC concept is an excellent one, because no single group in India can afford to buy the necessary research equipment. The NBRC expects to spend around \$2 million on extramural research programs.

But repatriating scientists to senior positions could prove problematic. NBRC president, Prakash Tandon, says that salary will be on a par with that received by other government scientists. "We cannot create two salary structures, one for locals and another for expatriates, as this dampens morale," he says. Vijayalakshmi hopes that some researchers could be invited back as visiting faculty "for short time on attractive terms." But Prandon believes that "top scientists, who have earned enough money abroad will want to return and work for their motherland."

K.S. JAYARAMAN, NEW DELHI



NIH backs large transplant tolerance project

The NIH has made good its promise issued this May to award \$130 million for research designed to bring tolerance induction for organ transplants into clinical trials (*Nature Med.* 5, 470; 1999). The award, which is one of the largest grants ever from the NIH for clinical research, will fund research aimed at training the immune system to ignore transplanted organs, yet still attack invading pathogens. The procedure has proven successful in laboratory animals, and many transplant immunologists felt the time was right to bring the procedure to the clinic.

The project, known as the Collaborative Network for Clinical Research on Immune Tolerance, will be headed by Jeffrey Bluestone from the University of Chicago, and will involve nearly 40 research institutions from the US, Australia, Germany and the UK. Tolerogenic approaches will be tested on recipients of kidney transplants, as well as those receiving transplanted human islet cells to treat type I diabetes. The Juvenile Diabetes Foundation will contribute an additional \$14 million to the project.

KRIS NOVAK, NEW YORK

New groups created to monitor university spending

In a step towards output-targeted university funding, the Italian Ministry of Research has elected a special advisory board to monitor all national research projects. Historically, the use of public funds by universities has never been subjected to rigorous examination—a factor that has contributed to improper use of those funds.

The 42-member advisory board, with three individuals dedicated to each research discipline, met for the first time in mid-October to outline appropriate assessment criteria. In the field of medicine and biology, guidelines will focus on the relationship between results and the declared aims of a project, whether or not materials and methods used are state-of-the-art, the effectiveness of inter-university collaborations and publication output.

Enrico Solcia, Pavia University, and Mario Sangiorgi, Tor Vergata University, Rome, are both members of the new medicine advisory board and claim, "[T]his strongly signals that Italy is ready to adopt an investment-oriented culture as the engine of scientific progress in its academic community." Modena University's Fabio Benfenati, who has been appointed to the biology board, adds, "the Research Ministry's decision to implement sound control over spending represents a significant change in the way national funding priorities in biomedicine are defined."

The move is believed to go far beyond the reforms launched in 1997 (*Nature* 387, 538; 1997). "Since the beginning of the reform, the budget for national research projects has increased three-fold," says Jacopo Meldolesi, director of DIBIT, the research institute of the San Raffaele hospital in Milan, head of the biology medicine funding distribution committee.

Furthermore, officials from the Research Ministry told *Nature Medicine* that a large infrastructure fund will also be made available by the end of the year to reward the universities that have been most efficient in spending public money.

MARTINA BALLMAIER, MILAN