## US set to allow pesticide testing on people

Ending an eight-year stalemate, the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on 26 January issued the first federal rule explicitly allowing manufacturers to dose people with pesticides in efforts to win marketing approval for their products. The rule also permits the agency itself to conduct and fund such studies.

The regulation bars the use of pregnant women and children in intentional dosing studies, but allows them to participate in studies that monitor the effects of routine occupational or household exposure to pesticides (*Nat. Med.* **11**, 811; 2005).

The rule drew harsh criticism from Congressional Democrats and environmental lobbyists. But for the $10 billion US pesticide industry, it may make it easier to meet EPA standards for allowable pesticide residues on food.

Concerned by a growth in human testing, the EPA said in 1998 that it would not accept human data from companies aiming for pesticide marketing approvals. But a court overturned this policy in 2003. Since then, the agency has considered human data on a case-by-case basis.—*MW*

## New program gives postdocs a leg up

**The US National Institutes of Health (NIH) on 27 January announced a new program aimed at easing postdoctoral fellows' transition to becoming independent researchers. The initiative is an attempt to ease the bottleneck created by the doubling of postdocs in the biomedical sciences, without a corresponding increase in tenure-track faculty positions.**

**The new program allows for support of up to $1 million over five years for researchers in the early stages of their postdoctoral fellowship. The money is intended to help them complete their postdoc in the first two years and move to a permanent position in the final three.**

**There are an estimated 30,000 biomedical postdocs in the US, but only about 12% have a chance at getting a tenure-track position, according to the National Science Foundation. The average age a researcher receives the first independent NIH research grant has risen from 37 in 1980 to 42 in 2002. New investigators together account for just six percent of the total NIH grants budget, leading many to either pursue a career in industry or abandon science altogether.—*JR***

News briefs written by Jacqueline Ruttimann, Meredith Wadman and Emily Waltz.

## US, UK clash over funds for AIDS, abortion

**The Bush administration is stepping up funding for its abstinence-based HIV/AIDS prevention programs while refusing to aid groups that do not oppose prostitution and abortion. Saying the strategy hinders efforts to stop the disease, the UK plans to support organizations the US will not fund.**

**In February, the UK announced that it would provide $5.3 million to abortion programs that do not qualify for funds from the US. President Bush in 2003 instated a 'gag rule' that excludes funds to organizations that provide counseling on abortion.**

**President Bush's AIDS program also grants funds only to groups that explicitly oppose prostitution and sex trafficking. Of the $533 million spent on AIDS prevention since Bush announced the program in 2003, $141 million has supported abstinence or faith-based programs, according to a report published in December by the advocacy group Center for Health and Gender Equity.**

**In January the US reneged on an HIV/AIDS prevention campaign with the British Broadcasting Corporation and with Tanzanian broadcasters after it learned that their programs might have portrayed sex workers without explicitly condemning the practice. The broadcasters are looking for another partner.—*EW***

## Biologists' secrecy said to stall science

Biologists are secretive about their work and their attitude is hindering younger scientists' progress, according to two studies published in February. Because young researchers learn by watching others, the authors say, life sciences research is likely to remain fraught with secrecy.

In one study, the authors, medical researchers at the Institute for Health Policy at the Massachusetts General Hospital, examined how biologists communicate their work with their colleagues in informal conversations or in conference presentations. Of 1,849 life scientists at 100 American universities, nearly one-third said they had stayed tight-lipped while chatting with their colleagues (*Acad. Med.* **81**, 137; 2006). Those who withheld data were more likely to have relationships with companies. Male scientists were more likely to withhold data than female scientists.

In the second survey, the authors studied how scientists hide information from their graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. Of 1,017 young investigators at 50 American universities, 20.6% said a senior scientist had refused to divulge to them results or know-how from unpublished work (*Acad. Med.* **81**, 128; 2006). More than one-half said their senior colleagues' secretiveness impeded their education. Trainees who had been denied information were also more than four times as likely to abandon their research projects.—*EW*

## Cloning scandal spells trouble for US collaborator

Gerald Schatten, the American researcher who co-authored a fraudulent cloning paper, is not guilty of scientific misconduct, but shirked his responsibilities as a scientist, the University of Pittsburgh concluded in February.

REUTERS/Lee Jae-Won

Woo-Suk Hwang and Gerald Schatten, co-authors of a fraudulent paper, in happier times.

Schatten championed Woo-Suk Hwang, who is said to have deliberately faked two papers that presented evidence of stem cells derived from cloned human embryos (*Science* **303**, 1669; 2004, *Science* **308**, 1777; 2005). Hwang is also accused of unethically obtaining the eggs used in the experiments (*Nat. Med.* **12**, 4; 2006).

The University of Pittsburgh launched a panel to investigate Schatten's role in the scandal. In its report, the panel said that Schatten had "lobbied hard" to have Hwang's 2004 paper published in *Science*. Schatten also wrote the 2005 paper using the raw data Hwang's lab generated and accepted $40,000 in consultation fees, the university said.

The report criticized Schatten, saying he agreed to be a co-author to enhance his reputation. Schatten did not fulfill his responsibility by verifying the experiments, but did not deliberately conspire with Hwang to fake the paper, the committee said.—*EW*