

OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

Authors Turn Up Heat Over Disputed Paper

The furor continues over a legally embattled study of cancer risk among former IBM workers. Last week, 13 authors withdrew nine articles from a special issue of a journal on workers' health, with the support of the guest editor, to protest the publisher's rejection of the paper.

The controversial study, by epidemiologists Richard Clapp of Boston University and Rebecca Johnson of Epicenter in Circle Pines, Minnesota, suggests that some IBM computer-chip workers were more likely than members of the general population to die of certain cancers. IBM has dismissed the analysis, noting that the research was paid for by attorneys for former IBM workers who are suing IBM, and that Clapp was a potential witness for the plaintiffs. (A judge ruled that the study could not be admitted as evidence in one case because it did not establish a link between workplace exposure and increased cancer risk.)

In March, IBM lawyers warned Clapp that publishing the paper would violate a court order specifying that the internal IBM data be used only in litigation (*Science*, 14 May, p. 937). In response, Clapp withdrew the paper from a special issue of *Clinics in Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, published by Elsevier.

Clapp resubmitted the article in May, however, after receiving legal advice that the study was in the public domain. The journal's guest editor, toxicologist Joseph LaDou of the University of California, San Francisco, who was also listed as a potential witness for plaintiffs suing IBM, accepted it a second time. (It had already cleared peer review.) But Elsevier overruled LaDou, turning the article away, according to Elsevier, because the *Clinics* journals publish review articles, not original research.

Nothing in Elsevier's instructions to him precluded articles with original research, LaDou says, adding, "They don't want it because it's a hot potato." In an e-mail sent on 17 June, LaDou and 11 of the 12 other authors pulled their papers from the journal not long before it was to go to press; the last author has since joined the boycott.

Elsevier spokesperson Eric Merkel-Sobotta said, "Hostage-taking is not an effective way of getting your point across." Asked whether IBM had contacted Elsevier about the study, Merkel-Sobotta said, "there's been no coercion and no threats." IBM spokesperson Chris Andrews says that IBM "has not contacted anyone with regards to [Clapp's] intent to publish." —**DAN FERBER**

provides a remarkable picture of prehistoric migration," says the BGS's Jane Evans.

The connection with Stonehenge, though, is circumstantial. The monument's outer ring is made of huge sandstones believed to have been quarried from the Marlborough Downs, 30 kilometers to the north. The smaller blue-stones in the inner ring are thought to have

been hauled from the Preseli Hills, 250 kilometers away in southwest Wales, and arranged at Stonehenge between 4000 and 4400 years ago. Fitzpatrick says the association between the bones and the stones is irresistible. Other archaeologists are looking forward to probing that tantalizing hypothesis further. —**RICHARD STONE**

NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

Panel Weighs Starter R01 Grants

For years, the biomedical community has worried about the graying of the average investigator supported by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). A National Academy of Sciences (NAS) panel tackling this stubborn problem has revived an old idea: a special grant tailored to young researchers with bright ideas but little or no preliminary data. At a workshop last week, participants were mostly positive but noted problems that would need to be overcome.

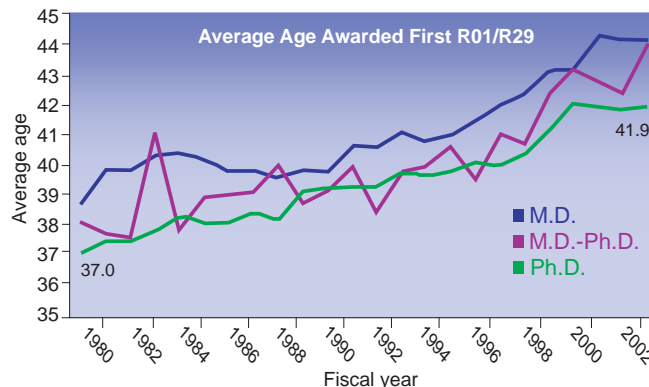
Experts have watched with alarm as the proportion of researchers under 35 receiving grants from NIH has slipped from 23% in 1980 to below 4% in 2001 (*Science*, 4 October 2002, p. 40). As possible reasons, they point to fewer new tenure-track positions and more complex biology, among others. NIH Director Elias Zerhouni, who asked for the NAS study, told the committee that he wants "specific action steps" and "testable pilots" rather than more handwringing.

NIH had such a pilot once, called the R29. But it was phased out 6 years ago after the agency concluded that it was too small (at \$70,000 a year compared with more than \$160,000 at the time for the standard R01 grant) and that it was not valued by universities. Instead, NIH added a checkbox for new investigators on the R01 application and asked reviewers to put less emphasis on preliminary data. But the checkbox hasn't made any difference, notes the NAS committee's chair, Thomas Cech, who is also president of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute in Chevy Chase, Maryland.

Instead, Cech and his co-members are contemplating a different kind of R01. By keeping the name, Cech says, the 5-year grant would give investigators as much money as a regular R01 and wouldn't "carry a stigma" with tenure committees. NIH would drop the

section for preliminary data and judge applicants on the methods they propose and previous experience, such as papers and patents. Study sections would review these grants separately from regular R01s.

NIH program staff expressed a few concerns. "If somebody has preliminary data, they will try to tuck it in," and study sections may favor those grants, predicted Brent Stanfield, acting director of the NIH Center for Scientific Review. And with the flattening of NIH's budget, finding money for the new program might require rebalancing the grants portfolio or capping large R01 grants, other participants noted.



Ageing youngsters. The average age of new investigators receiving the two main NIH research grant types rose by about 5 years in the past 2 decades.

But the special R01 sounds like a good idea to Howard Garrison, public affairs director for the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology. "Most people I know are very supportive of doing something like this," he says. And one young investigator at the workshop, University of Maryland cell biologist Iqbal Hamza, 36, says, "I love it." Hamza was told not to apply for an R01 because his idea was too radical. And the size of the awards from the NIH program that eventually funded his proposal are much smaller.

Cech's committee is also examining how to help postdocs gain independence and whether more non-tenure-track faculty members should be eligible for R01 grants. He says the panel expects to issue its report later this year. —**JOCELYN KAISER**