

First Human Trial of Synthetic Birth-control Vaccine Begun in Australia*

Thirty women volunteered for the world's first human trial of a synthetic birth-control vaccine, which began in February 1986 in Adelaide, Australia—at Flinders Medical Centre, a collaborating centre of the World Health Organization (WHO). The trial, which is part of WHO's Special Programme of Research, Development, and Research Training, in Human Reproduction, is scheduled to last for nine months, and aims to determine the safety and side-effects of the vaccine in already-sterilized women.

If this trial is successful, the vaccine will be tested on fertile women to determine its efficacy as a birth-control method. Also to be determined is the duration of the vaccine's effect, which is foreseen as likely to be between one and two years. WHO estimates that, if all the trials proceed satisfactorily, the vaccine could be available by the mid-1990s.

The vaccine was developed by Ohio State University (USA), in collaboration with other academic institutions, the pharmaceutical industry, and WHO, over the past

decade. It has already been shown to be safe in several animal species, and to prevent pregnancy in baboons.

'The vaccine may prove to be as important a development in birth-control technology as the contraceptive pill', said Mr David Griffin, a WHO official involved in the vaccine's development. 'The vaccine offers a number of advantages over many current methods, and this should make it a valuable addition to the options available to the public'. Advantages seem likely to include the simplicity of administering it, its long-term effectiveness, and the absence of drug-related side-effects.

The vaccine is based on a hormone, human chorionic gonadotrophin (hCG), which is produced soon after fertilization and is necessary for the establishment and maintenance of early pregnancy. When injected, the vaccine triggers an immune response that neutralizes the hormone, thus interrupting the reproductive process before the fertilized ovum has become implanted successfully in the womb.

The World Health Organization chose Flinders Medical Centre as the site of the trial because it has long been involved in the development of the vaccine, and because it offers the varied facilities needed for such complex trials.

WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
Avenue Appia 20
1211 Geneva 27
Switzerland.

* On learning of this event we asked the President of Negative Population Growth, Inc., Donald Mann, for a comment and he replied (*in litt.* 24 March 1986) that he did not feel qualified to give an opinion on what he referred to as 'a most interesting and promising development, indeed', but added: 'Our viewpoint is that while improved contraceptives are essential, the heart of the matter [lies in] motivating couples to have not more than one child or two children at the most'—see also the Guest Comment by Professor Gordon L. Ada on page 100 of this issue.—Ed.

IUCN-CEP's European Committee for National Conservation Strategies

Late in 1985, IUCN's Commission on Environmental Planning (IUCN-CEP) decided to form a 'European Committee for National Conservation Strategies' (EC-NCS), as a follow-up of the elaboration of the World Conservation Strategy and as a companion, on the European scene, of the Committee on the Ecodevelopment of Cultural Landscapes (CECL) which had been founded in 1971 mainly for the Central and East European countries.

The aim of EC-NCS is to encourage, share, and discuss, European supranational, national, and subnational, conservation strategies in order to learn from each other's experience. Common interests might also lead to the preparation of a European Conservation Strategy, and a strengthening of transfrontier conservation and antipollution activities. Examples of pertinent substantive topics for NCSs are trade and aid with the Third World, agricultural policy, post-industrial service economy and qualitative growth, and, of pertinent procedural topics, consensus building tactics and strengthening of links with international organizations.

At a meeting held in Brussels, Belgium, on 21–22 April 1986 in preparation for the Ottawa Conference on the

World Conservation Strategy, the EC-NCS realized that an immediate step should be due involvement in the Ottawa Conference on the World Conservation Strategy, and that another should be to have presentations on the European national and international conservation scenes. Later in the year, a more direct link should be established with the Council of Europe's 'European Campaign for the Countryside 1987–88', and with the 'European Environment Year 1987' which has been designated by the European Economic Community and should give further impetus to actions.

Potential members of the EC-NCS are invited by the undersigned to participate on an *ad hoc* basis amongst teams interested in and working on National and Regional Conservation Strategies in Western European Countries. Experts wishing to receive more information are requested to contact the undersigned.

MAX BÖRLIN, *Chairman of EC-NCS*
Chemin des Bosquets
1297 Founex
Vaud, Switzerland.

Interuniversity Postgraduate Programme in Hydrology

Under the sponsorship of the Belgian National Committee of the International Hydrological Programme and UNESCO, this programme, involving formal instruction extending over one or two years, includes an orientation in water pollution control. In addition, seminars—mainly presented by invited guest-lecturers—provide a broad background of both general and some specific environmental aspects.

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