

CORRESPONDENCE

together for a free exchange of scientific information and a harmonious relationship for a balanced and humane growth of the society, the Centre should have an up-to-date data bank on Indian scientists, scientific bodies, associations, institutes and organizations. It should also be able

to provide any mediaman an easy access to information on the latest developments in science in the country and abroad, guide and assist him in contacting scientists and providing him background material on any topic of his interest. Besides, it also should be a training

ground for scientists in the art of communication in various media.

DILIP M. SALWI

*MIG Flat No. 132, Pkt-8B,
Sector-IV, Rohini,
Delhi 110 085, India*

Swarnajayanti fellowships

An announcement calling for research grants from scientists in the age group of 30 to 40 years under the Swarnajayanti Fellowships sponsored by Department of Science and Technology was advertised in the 25 August issue of *Current Science*. In the first week of September I received a letter from DST enclosing a copy of the same advertisement and urging me to submit an application in this category. After examining the format of the proposal and the fact that it was announced as part of the celebrations marking 50 years of India's independence, it became clear to me that major research projects in the frontier and cutting edge areas of science and technology were to be submitted. As a matter of fact, the screening for the successful applicants is planned through a two-tier review system.

In any research project the applicant would like to propose his/her best and most innovative ideas. The writing of a new and major research project is done in stages, from the evolution of the idea to the development of a concrete work plan. This is an arduous, time-consuming

and responsible job for the applicant. This is further heightened in this case because the Swarnajayanti Fellowship scheme is so prestigious. Given this background, I was somewhat puzzled to note that there was hardly any time allowed for the writing of the project. As per the announcement, the documents must reach DST by 15 September 1997. I am unable to understand how a detailed project report can be drafted, finalized and forwarded to DST in less than two weeks.

The DST-sponsored research projects are publicly funded and it is important that they are implemented in a manner so as to maximally benefit a large and diverse group of scientists. In my opinion, the DST has not allowed sufficient time for the dissemination of information to the large body of scientists. In such a scenario, the tendency would be to submit hastily 'pasted' research proposals in order to make it prior to the deadline. This is not in the interest of a correct scientific attitude and the development of a high quality research base in our country. In any system of open competition,

not only must an equal opportunity be provided to all the contenders but it must also appear to be so to everyone concerned. The procedure for the submission of Swarnajayanti Fellowship applications must appear to be fair and open to the large body of committed and dedicated scientists in this country. The urgency and haste with which applications have been called for makes people suspicious. In such a scenario, any further action by the DST will also be called into question, with charges of nepotism, favouritism, high-handedness, etc. being levelled, whether or not any of these aspects were intended. I urge the DST to kindly extend the deadline for the submission of grants in this category, say up to 31 December 1997. This will give sufficient time to the eligible scientists to submit detailed and rigorous research proposals in the thrust areas.

ASHWINI NANGIA

*School of Chemistry,
University of Hyderabad,
Hyderabad 500 007, India*

Medical research in India

Poverty, unhygienic living conditions and over population are chiefly responsible for infectious diseases and malnutrition in India. Environmental chemicals are also responsible for health hazard in our country. Keeping this in mind, several scientists, all over the country, have been working on prevention and control of these national health problems. This fact is evident from the research findings of

Indian scientists who were honoured by Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) recently. The research works of 14 out of 19 scientists who received ICMR awards, are directly related to national health problems. These are (1) safe, effective and reversible male contraceptive, (2) fertility-regulating vaccines, (3) immuno-diagnosis of leprosy and designing of subunit vaccines, (4)

development of simple procedures for the isolation of *M. tuberculosis*, (5) immunogenetic basis of susceptibility to leprosy and pulmonary tuberculosis, (6) molecular evaluation of Japanese Encephalitis viruses, (7) insecticide-impregnated bed-nets for malaria control, (8) molecular biology of malaria parasite, (9) malaria vaccine development, (10) malnutrition and infectious diseases with relevance to

child health, (11) pathophysiology of acute diarrhoeal diseases with reference to acute infectious diarrhoea, (12) neurotoxicities of environmental chemicals with reference to insecticides, (13) epidemiology and clinical features of Tropical Sprue and (14) population-based survival studies in cancer patients.

We have sufficient knowledge about the causes and treatment of communicable diseases and malnutrition. With adequate health education and Public Health Programme these diseases can be controlled, as it is done in developed countries. Therefore, I emphasize that control and eradication of the causes of these diseases are more relevant than research in this field. However, researchers in health sciences in India should give priority to two fields namely, male and female antifertility agents and health hazards (occupational and air/water contamination) caused by environmental chemicals.

Research works based on health problems of third world countries are not published by reputed journals because the findings do not come in the fold of their health problem. It is therefore logical for our scientists to publish their findings in Indian journals. The suggestions made by our scientists are sometimes applied in public health programmes without publication in journals. This fact may account for a lesser number of publications by Indian scientists in American and European journals.

However, we should not lag behind our counterparts in the developed countries. Hence several scientists have chosen clinical and experimental (animal) studies

on neurological, cardiovascular, renal, hormonal and immunological disorders and cancer. Although technique/equipment used by our scientists are much older, their findings are recognized for publication. Further, our scientists visit developed countries and present their findings in conferences/seminars. Our researchers are unable to do better than this due to unavailability of laboratory facilities and financial assistance and due to lack of freedom to choose a relevant field.

The data presented by Arunachalam (*Curr. Sci.*, 1997, 72, 912-922) clearly indicate that academic institutions (universities and medical colleges) contribute more than research institutions to research in health sciences. In spite of having heavy teaching load and other work in the department, teachers choose research work too. Unfortunately, several of them do not receive encouragement and facilities for research. If the Head of the Department is incompetent for research, then there is suppression of research activities in the department. This rules out leadership and team work.

Furthermore, a researcher in an academic field is not benefited from his/her research publications and research awards. Rules and conditions of promotions do not give preference to research achievements but only to years of service. As a result, fixation of pay scale and promotions are at a bargaining level. The genuine requests of teachers are turned down on flimsy grounds and they are warned 'any request in this regard will not be entertained'. We are forced to run

around to get our service anomalies rectified. Under this circumstance, research which needs dedicated work and freedom gets only a stepmotherly treatment from a suppressed and humiliated teacher. The facts quoted by me here are neither imaginary nor fictional but experienced by many hapless teachers including me. This culture is seriously harming academic standards in higher level education and motivation for research.

Further, I would like to add here that if research on health problems come under a banner 'Health Sciences' instead of 'Medical Sciences', then there may be collaboration between medical and non-medical (those not having a basic medical degree but specialized in one of the medical subjects) scientists and with experts in allied subjects.

A research funding agency like ICMR plays a major role in solving national health problems. But due to shortage of funds, they are not able to sanction research projects proposed by teachers in universities/medical colleges. If the hurdles enumerated here are removed, then research works in health sciences can have a forward march in India also.

VANAJA PAUL

*Department of Pharmacology &
Environmental Toxicology,
Dr A.L.M. Postgraduate Institute of
Basic Medical Sciences,
University of Madras, Taramani,
Chennai 600 113, India*