

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

POLICY

Seeds of change

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) on 3 January proposed removing restrictions on the use of maize (corn) and soya bean seeds that are genetically engineered to tolerate 2,4-D, a weedkiller that is commonly used on other crops. More widespread use of the genetically modified seeds, which are made by Dow AgroSciences in Indianapolis, Indiana, along with 2,4-D could drive evolutionary selection for weeds that are resistant to the chemical, the agency cautioned. But the USDA noted that the move would provide a much-needed tool for farmers to manage fields that are already plagued by weeds resistant to another weedkiller, glyphosate (Roundup).

Clinical data

A lack of access to clinical-trial data is hindering research and medical care, according to a British government report released on 3 January. In the report, which also examined the United Kingdom's stockpiling programme for the influenza drug Tamiflu

NUMBER CRUNCH

72%

The increase in female speakers at the American Society for Microbiology general meeting in sessions organized by teams that included at least one woman, compared with those set up by all-male teams, according to a study of conferences from 2011 to 2013.

Source: Casadevall, A. & Handelsman, J. *mBio* <http://dx.doi.org/10.1128/mBio.00846-13> (2014).



LI XIN/XINHUA PRESS/CORBIS

China joins ivory-crushing campaign

China's government crushed more than six tonnes of seized ivory in Dongguan on 6 January, as part of a global effort to crack down on illegal trading in smuggled tusks and carvings. The move was China's first public destruction of

ivory, showing the country's intention to thwart a worrying rise in elephant poaching (see *Nature* **503**, 452; 2013). The United States crushed a similar weight of ivory last November. See go.nature.com/ib2fpa for more.

(oseltamivir), the authors say that evaluation of the efficacy of Tamiflu and other medicines has been hampered by drug manufacturers withholding data. The report follows recent European and US initiatives to increase data sharing and transparency in clinical trials. See page 131 and go.nature.com/9lgbd6 for more.

Gun controls

The US Department of Health and Human Services proposed on 3 January that patient-privacy exemptions should be created so that relevant mental-health records can be submitted to the national databases used to screen potential gun buyers. So far, background checks have prevented the sale of more than 2 million firearms, according to the White House.

But some researchers who study firearms violence have called for better safeguards against gun ownership by those who are mentally ill (see *Nature* **496**, 412–415; 2013).

Cannabis commerce

The world's first legal market for recreational marijuana opened in Colorado on 1 January. Colorado is one of only two US states to have approved non-medicinal use of marijuana by adults (see go.nature.com/rtr3ou). Although the drug remains illegal under national laws, the US government has said that it will not interfere with state industries kept under strict local controls. Last month, Uruguay became the first country to approve a national market for legal marijuana, which has yet to be implemented.

New drug approvals

The US Food and Drug Administration approved 27 new drugs in 2013, down from a 15-year high of 39 drugs the year before, which some analysts had taken as a signal of revived fortunes in the pharmaceutical industry. The agency told reporters that it had received fewer drug applications for review in 2013 and that the number of approvals was in line with the average of 28 new drugs approved annually over the past five years.

EVENTS

Asteroid ahoy!

A small asteroid disintegrated above the Atlantic Ocean on 2 January, becoming only the second space rock to be spotted hours before it hit Earth. The Catalina Sky Survey near

US (CE) Tucson, Arizona, discovered asteroid 2014 AA in the small hours of 1 January. The rock, some 2 to 3 metres across, burned up on hitting Earth's atmosphere. In October 2008, researchers tracked asteroid 2008 TC₃ all the way from space to the desert wastes of northern Sudan, where fragments of it were recovered as meteorites (see *Nature* **458**, 401–403; 2009).

Cold comfort

Scientists, journalists and tourists were rescued from the Russian ship *Akademik Shokalskiy* in the Antarctic on 2 January. The vessel had been on a research voyage when it became trapped by ice near Commonwealth Bay on 24 December. Chinese icebreaker *Xue Long* transferred the stranded passengers to an Australian icebreaker, but later reported that it, too, had become stuck. A US icebreaker was dispatched on 5 January to assist the Russian and Chinese vessels. See page 133 for more.

PEOPLE

Fossil felony

A fossil retailer from Eagle, Colorado, pleaded guilty on 2 January to conspiracy to smuggle dinosaur bones and other fossils into the United States from China and Mongolia. John Richard



Rolater agreed to surrender any claims to the illegally obtained goods, which include a fossilized skull of a juvenile *Tyrannosaurus bataar* (pictured) that is estimated to be worth US\$1,875,000. Other items include a sabre-toothed cat skull and dinosaur eggs. Rolater has also agreed to pay a \$25,000 fine and submit to two years of supervised probation.

Turing pardon

British mathematician Alan Turing has received a posthumous royal pardon. In 1952, Turing was convicted of 'gross indecency' under anti-homosexuality legislation, and later took his own life. Turing's work in the Second World War helped to break the German Enigma cipher, and his concept of a universal 'Turing machine', a programmable system that stores and processes information, is considered a cornerstone of computer science (see *Nature* **482**, 441; 2012).

RESEARCH

Falsified research

The US Office of Research Integrity has sanctioned two biomedical researchers in seven days. On 30 December, the agency reported that Baoyan Xu, a former postdoctoral fellow at the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) in Bethesda, Maryland, had published falsified data on the immune responses of patients with hepatitis to a newly discovered virus. A week earlier, Dong-Pyou Han, a former research assistant professor at Iowa State University of Science and Technology in Ames, was found to have falsified results when researching a vaccine against human immunodeficiency virus 1 (HIV-1) by spiking rabbit blood samples with antibodies. The false results had been reported widely at national and international meetings, and in NIH grant applications.

Open access

An international open-access effort kicks off this month to make all particle-physics research articles freely available to readers. The Sponsoring Consortium for Open Access Publishing in Particle Physics (SCOAP³) is led by CERN, Europe's high-energy physics laboratory near Geneva, Switzerland.

COMING UP

10–15 JANUARY

Understanding how cells' nuclear receptors regulate gene expression is the focus of a Keystone Symposium on Molecular and Cellular Biology in Taos, New Mexico. Hot topics include the roles of nuclear receptors in wound healing and cancer progression. go.nature.com/rs9oyb

15–17 JANUARY

The 8th Human Amyloid Imaging meeting in Miami, Florida, will discuss the latest research on measuring and interpreting changes in amyloid protein in the brain, as well as other biomarkers linked to Alzheimer's disease. go.nature.com/oi5wkp

The project has already experienced a few hiccups, with some major journals and universities opting not to participate. See page 141 for more.

FUNDING

Cancer donation

Six US research centres have received a combined donation of US\$540 million from the estate of late shipping magnate Daniel Ludwig. The gift will boost funding for the Ludwig Centers at Johns Hopkins University, Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, Stanford University and the University of Chicago. Announced on 6 January, the donation brings the total contribution to cancer research by Ludwig and his estate to \$2.5 billion.

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TREND WATCH

Recent years have seen a declining share of the US economy spent on biomedical research and development (R&D), while several Asian nations are boasting growing investments (see chart), according to a study published on 2 January (J. Chakma *et al.* *N. Engl. J. Med.* **370**, 3–6; 2014). The shifting trends mark changes in spending by the biomedical industry, perhaps reflecting lower labour costs and more government subsidies for commercial R&D in Asia, the authors suggest.

ASIAN R&D BOOM

Countries including China, India and South Korea boost biomedical spending as US dominance slips.

