Cooperative Research Sought by the Prof. N. N. Petrov Research Institute of Oncology, St. Petersburg

This letter is motivated by our deep concern regarding the situation in Russian cancer research and, specifically, in the oldest cancer research facility in Russia, the Prof. N. N. Petrov Research Institute of Oncology. The economic situation in Russia during recent years has led to heavy cuts in basic research, including cancer research. Federal budget funding for the institute for 1995 is only $479.9 million rubles, about $122,000. This money supports over 200 scientists and technicians. The average salary is $67 per month (the chief of laboratory is paid $105 per month), while the cost of living in Russia is now comparable to that in the United States. No funds are available for reagents, equipment, laboratory animals, etc. We at the institute are avoiding an inevitable decline in scientific potential through the enthusiasm of the dedicated staff.

N. N. Petrov, A. I. Serebrov, S. A. Khodin, A. I. Rakov, L. F. Larionov, N. V. Lazarev, L. M. Shabad, V. M. Dilman, and many other scientists with worldwide reputations have worked at this institute. Today, a large group of scientists whose contributions to cancer research are well known to colleagues in other countries is working here. Many of these researchers have experience in cooperative studies with international institutions (the World Health Organization [WHO], the International Agency for Research on Cancer [IARC]) and with research institutions and universities of the United States, Europe, and Japan. Institute scientists have obtained international fellowships from IARC, the U.S. National Cancer Institute (NCI), WHO, the International Science Foundation (ISF), and other organizations. Many are members of the European Association for Cancer Research (EACR) and the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR).

There is nothing in the priorities of the government and the Parliament that indicates increased funding for basic research in the foreseeable future. This funding situation will lead to a collapse of cancer research-related projects in Russia, with negative consequences for the international scientific community.

There already has been a "brain drain" from our institute, with many young scientists going to more profitable businesses or leaving for other countries. We want to stay and work in Russia. Therefore, we appeal to the international scientific community to consider the possibilities of grants for cooperative research with the N. N. Petrov Institute. This letter should not be seen as an appeal for humanitarian aid. Our qualifications and experience in collaboration with international research centers will allow us to respond to your proposals or to suggest new projects for cooperative work and to conduct them efficiently. We look forward to hearing from and working with the international cancer research community.

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National Cancer Institute Response
Editor's note: The above Correspondence by Alexandrov et al. was forwarded to the National Cancer Institute's Office of International Affairs, which offers the following response:

We certainly appreciate the plight of our Russian colleagues and wish them the best under very trying circumstances. We would like to assure these authors, and readers in general, that the National Cancer Institute (NCI) is devoting significant resources for support of Russian biomedical scientists. Among the mechanisms of support are the following:

1) About 100 Russian scientists visit NCI-supported laboratories each year to receive specialized training and/or to conduct collaborative research with U.S. scientists. Support comes from either the Short-Term Scientist Exchange Program of NCI's Office of International Affairs or from NCI intramural research funds under the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Visiting Program.

2) NCI also has made considerable resources available to cancer researchers in Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union through its CDA-NIS Program (Career Development Awards for Young Cancer Researchers in the Newly Independent States of the
Former USSR). These awards are designed to assist researchers in maintaining an active research program at their home institutions. The NCI has made awards to investigators in Russia (including the Prof. N. N. Petrov Research Institute of Oncology), Ukraine, and each of the Baltic Republics. About a half million dollars has been invested in this program.

3) Collaborative research between U.S. and foreign scientists is supported under the Fogarty International Research Collaboration Awards (FIRCA). In the period 1992-1995, NIH funded 51 FIRCA grants involving Russian institutions.

4) Foreign scientists are also eligible to apply for regular, investigator-initiated research grants (R01) from NIH, either as independent principal investigators or as co-investigators with collaborators in the United States. In general, grants to foreign institutions are made when a project presents special opportunities because of unusual talents, resources, populations, or environmental conditions. The NCI supports about 80 foreign grants and contracts, and there are many more domestic grants that have a foreign component. There are no current grants listing Russian principal investigators.

Because seeking biomedical research support in the United States is a process that is, for the most part, investigator-initiated, the key to establishment of collaborative research projects between scientists at foreign institutions and colleagues in the United States is the development of personal links between individuals with common interests. We would urge Russian scientists to identify appropriate U.S. counterparts (via the scientific literature) and to personally explore possible avenues for collaboration.

Further information about NCI’s international programs may be obtained from: Office of International Affairs, National Cancer Institute, 6130 Executive Blvd, MSC 7301, Bethesda, MD 20892-7301 (e-mail: nc6@cu.nih.gov; www: http://www.ncic.nci.nih.gov/oia/master.html; fax: 301-496-3954).

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Erratum: “High Frequency of Chromosome 9p Allelic Loss and CDKN2 Tumor Suppressor Gene Alterations in Squamous Cell Carcinoma of the Bladder,” by Gonzalez-Zulueta et al. [J Natl Cancer Inst 1995;87:1383-93 (Issue 18)]. The authors wish to correct an error in the list of authors’ names: The name Mahmoud El-Baz was incorrectly given as Mustafa Elbaz.