GENERAL SCIENCE

Basic Research Still Strong

The need for basic scientific research in the United States is as vital as ever and Government funds continue to be provided—By Faye Marley

➤ LOOSE talk about basic research being deemphasized by the National Institutes of Health in favor of applied target scientific research was denounced by Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare John W. Gardner.

Speaking before an impressive array of consultants in Bethesda, Md., including such scientists as Dr. Michael E. DeBakey of artificial heart fame and Dr. Albert B. Sabin, whose live polio vaccine has been of practical use to children all over the world, Secretary Gardner warned that "it is possible to waste vast amounts of money under the banner of practicality" if there is no scientific base.

The individual efforts of the basic researcher will always be in danger of neglect and always in need of special encouragement in our practical-minded society, he pointed out. It would be "incredibly short-sighted if at this time of swiftly expanding horizons in the biological sciences we were to conclude that basic research should be deemphasized," he said.

At the same time there have been rumors afoot that applied research is being neglected by the National Institutes of Health, the Secretary said, stating that approximately 60% of NIH research expenditures are for work that most scientists would describe as "applied."

"The question of whether one of these activities should be given greater or less emphasis is a question that is not unique to the biomedical fields," he said. "It is an old chestnut and it has been debated in every field of science and scholarship."

Creation of the regional medical programs following passage of the Heart Disease, Cancer and Stroke amendments by Congress last year points up the need for more dynamic Federal leadership in the application of the fruits of our investment in basic research, he said.

These programs are an "interesting hint of the significant role that the university is likely to have in the application of knowledge in a health service setting." University extension activity in the medical fields is going to be very "lively indeed."

Secretary Gardner is appointing a special advisory committee on university relationships within four to six weeks.

The committee, which will be composed of representatives of education, science and Government, will work with Surgeon General William H. Stewart, Commissioner of Education Harold Howe II and various agencies.

Actively involved in the initial planning will be Dr. Philip R. Lee, HEW Assistant Secretary for Health and Scientific Affairs, and HEW Assistant Secretary for Education, Paul Miller.

Secretary Gardner said he was certain that the total amount to be spent by the Federal Government on "delivery of health services" is going to increase steadily and rapidly for quite a long time to come.

"But this certainly will not, and has never in the past, come out of a fixed health dollar, with research losing what health services gain."

Speaking of the increased cost of research, the Secretary said that since the NIH programs involve a budget of $1.3 billion. increases in the future cannot continue at 30% or even at 15%.

Dr. John F. Sherman, associate director for Extramural Programs of NIH, pointed out that there might have to be fewer grants but a greater size in the amount for the average selected research project.

HUMBLE OIL AND REFINING COMPANY

ROOM FOR ONE MORE—An adult cattle egret, in flight, joins dozens of other birds in a water-conservation lagoon system at Humble Oil's Baytown, Texas refinery. The long-necked waterfowl at the right are Louisiana herons and most of the other birds are young egrets.

CONSERVATION

Egrets and Herons Make Home Near Oil Refinery

➤ A DO-IT-YOURSELF bird sanctuary has come into being spontaneously in a 380-acre area of water-conservation lagoons at Humble Oil and Refining Company's refinery in Baytown, Texas.

Egrets, herons, rare roseate spoonbills and other birds are building nests in thickets around the edges of the water, directly south of one of the refinery's big catalytic-cracking units and close to derricks in a nearby oil field.

The presence of abundant wildlife seems to be a sign that the water-purification system is working well. In Humble's three-stage cleansing system water used for industrial purposes is treated chemically in the regular purification facilities and then retained for 45 days in the lagoons before being released to the adjacent Houston Ship Channel.

Natural oxidation in the lagoons supplements the effects of the earlier mechanical aeration, and bacteria and algae are also useful in improving the quality of the refinery's waste-water in an effort to curb water pollution.