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## Letters

### Denouncement under fire

I am writing regarding "Treatment for brain damage under fire" (SN: 12/4/82, p. 357). The article reports a formal denouncement by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) of methods of treatment developed and widely used by the Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential (IAHP) in Philadelphia, Pa. . . .

Advances in neuroscience, rivaled only by those in molecular biology and genetics, have in the past decade provided a burgeoning body of evidence that now demonstrate the resiliency, redundancy and self-restoring potential of brain mechanisms. The plasticity of the central nervous system is well documented as is the ability of sensorimotor activity to influence its growth and development. Patterns of neuronal connectivity are not rigid, as was once supposed, and axonal sprouting, for example, is now accepted as a widespread phenomenon in the mammalian CNS. Recognition of the significance of this "new" perspective by the international scientific community was apparent when in 1981, Nobel Prizes were awarded to Hubel and Wiesel for their contributions to cortical neurophysiology and to Sperry for his work on cerebral lateralization.

Without any reference to the details of con-

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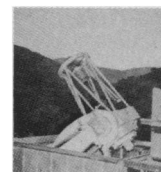
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Cover: The 36-inch telescope of the Monterey Institute for Research in Astronomy, located near Carmel, Calif., will spend a significant proportion of its time on a systematic search for supernovas designed by astrophysicists from the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory in Berkeley, Calif. (Photo: MIRA)



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troversies of the techniques employed by the IAHP, it can be said, at the very least, that the premises underlying their therapeutic approach are in concert with this current research. The same cannot be said of traditional methods of treatment of brain injury which, because of their assumptions that the CNS is inaccessible and irreparable, are veiled in an attitude of therapeutic nihilism.

We have no quarrel with the pediatricians or the need to conduct a properly controlled study. However, the stale, unfounded and uninformed accusations presented in the "statement" are not evidence, and therefore do not relieve the burden of proof which, as in any true court of justice, rests with the plaintiff, not the accused.

*Ralph Pelligra, M.D.*

*Member of the Board*

*The Institutes for the Achievement  
of Human Potential  
Philadelphia, Pa.*

**My review of the complete AAP statement** found it to totally disregard the large body of recent evidence about the malleable nature of the central nervous system. The references offered seem dated with only 4 of the 44 total having been published since 1970. Indeed, the

statement is nearly a verbatim copy of one published in 1968 while claiming to present current evidence.

Contradictory phrases such as "...individual sequential phylogenetic development" are used by the author(s). Their labels such as "patterning" and the "Doman-Delacato treatment" are inaccurate descriptions of The Institutes for the Achievement of Human Potential's comprehensive program applied to develop the CNS of both brain-injured and well children. The establishment of "hemispheric dominance" (more accurately, cortical lateralization) and patterning are but small parts of that program.

Interestingly, the Academy faults the promotional methods employed by The Institutes while at the same time issuing a press release to make known their statement. To my knowledge, The Institutes have generally been sought out by the media rather than the other way around.

It is sad that pediatricians may pass on discouraging information to parents about The Institutes' treatment for brain injury based on this pseudo-scientific statement. My argument is not with those pediatricians. It is with those misguided few who generated the baseless statement.

*Richard D. Norton  
Los Altos, Calif.*

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