

sors: 18 months. It has had subcommittees studying the needs of each astronomical subspecialty. Now the full board is trying to assemble the results of the subcommittee studies into a comprehensive report that will present a balanced program. The idea, says Dr. Doyle, is not to present a series of one-sentence recommendations, as some previous advisers have done, but to set up criteria for maintaining a balanced program, describing the kinds of things that should be done for each subspecialty and whether they should be done from the earth or space.

The board has had 16 meetings in a year and a half and, as it heads toward the end of its work, its pace is picking up. It was meeting over the weekend when the Apollo 10 astronauts were coming back from the moon. It scheduled two or three more meetings in June, and it hopes to have its report ready for presentation during the summer.

LATIN AMERICA

Updating the charts

The charts of the harbors of the Dominican Republic are based on surveys made in 1911 and 1914.

The only existing chart of the Honduran harbor at Puerto Cortes is based on surveys by the USS Dolphin in 1896.

The basic knowledge and technical skills required to modernize and develop new harbors are lacking in most Latin American countries. Thus, their economies, which are largely based on exporting bulk agricultural commodities, are handicapped.

A low-key operation within the U.S. Naval Oceanographic Office, the Harbor Survey Assistance Program has been working in Latin American countries on harbor charts.

Eight national programs have been conducted so far; charts of the Dominican harbors are now being updated, and the most recent HARSAP activity has centered around Puerto Cortes on the eastern Honduran coast, where a \$2 million plan for extensive modernization has already begun. That project begins this month, and will last for approximately four months.

In every case, according to HARSAP's project chief, Jose Vargas, the host country supplies 90 percent of the working force, the boats and equipment and the daily expenses. The U.S. Navy provides the hydrographers. And the effort is designed to leave behind not only harbor charts, but at least the seed of national hydrographic capabilities in Latin America, and a large measure of good will for the U.S.

574/science news/vol. 95/june 14, 1969

HEPATITIS

Virus identification promised

The Australia antigen was initially identified in the serum of an Australian aborigine. Several years ago, when it was discovered, the antigen was thought to be of possible value in the diagnosis of acute leukemia. It also has been found in patients with mongolism and nodular leprosy.

Now there are indications that this antigen may be the elusive hepatitis virus, at the bottom of both infectious and serum hepatitis.

The indications are good enough that the conservative JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION is willing to editorialize on the prospect. Under a headline that said, "Hepatitis Virus at Last?", JAMA on June 2 suggested, "The first step in developing a vaccine to make hepatitis preventable seems closer to reality."

It is only a first step, however, and none of the researchers pursuing the virus will offer a timetable for a vaccine.

Four scientists at the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md., report in the same issue of JAMA that what they have found are virus-like particles in the blood of patients with infectious and serum hepatitis. They also have found similar virus-like par-

ticles in the blood of healthy apes, believed to be carriers.

The Bethesda studies involved 237 patients with either infectious or serum hepatitis.

Human blood samples tested were obtained from four categories of patients:

- Those involved in an outbreak of infectious hepatitis in the United States in 1968.

- Patients with infectious hepatitis in West Africa, where the disease is prevalent. Serum samples were collected from them in 1963.

- Persons with apparent post-transfusion hepatitis, from whom serum samples were collected in 1968.

- Forty-six individuals who were exposed to hepatitis-containing blood products, and in whom clinical hepatitis ultimately developed.

The antigen was found in 68 of the 237 and the scientists believe more sensitive testing would turn it up in the rest.

The researchers include Drs. Richard J. Hirschman and N. Raphael Shulman of the National Institute of Arthritis and Metabolic Diseases; Lewellys F. Barker and Kendall O. Smith, both of the Division of Biologics Standards.

CIGARETTES

June 30: moment of truth

Bending to pressure from the tobacco lobby, the House Commerce Committee has moved to preserve the status quo in cigarette advertising. At the same time it is trying to appease anti-smoking forces by demanding more straightforward warnings on cigarette packages. Under the committee proposals, the airwaves will continue to be dominated by youthful couples inhaling by waterfalls, although if they read the cigarette pack, smokers learn that "The Surgeon General has determined that cigarette smoking is dangerous to your health and may cause lung cancer and other diseases."

Under legislation that expires June 30 (SN: 6/7, p. 553), smokers are merely cautioned that smoking may be hazardous to health, and no other action may be required of advertisers. Tobacco opponents hope simply to let that law expire opening the gates to new regulations already proposed by the Federal Trade and Communications Commissions (SN: 2/22, p. 185).

The new House bill, approved 22 to 5 by a committee with 9 members from major tobacco-growing states, would

continue to tie the hands of the regulatory agencies until 1975.

Conceding that anti-cigarette forces will not be taken in by the smoke-screen of stronger package warnings, committee Chairman Harley Staggers (D-W.Va.) anticipates considerable opposition when the entire House debates the issue within the next three weeks. Powerful opposition is expected also in the Senate from Commerce Committee Chairman Warren G. Magnuson (D-Wash.), an outspoken smoking critic, and from Sen. Frank Moss (D-Utah) who threatens a filibuster to keep the compromising, pro-industry bill from becoming law.

Though the National Association of Broadcasters voted in May to postpone any consideration of a voluntary ban in place of the FCC proposed prohibition, three independent television groups have dropped cigarette ads: Post-Newsweek stations, Bonneville International stations and the Westinghouse network. In addition, the Boston Globe and Christian Science Monitor have declared they will take no more cigarette ads after current contracts run out. ◊