

balance, many researchers say.

The use-inspired grants were also designed to link basic research within the Office of Science with applied research in DOE's offices of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, Nuclear Energy, and Fossil Energy. Since 2002, BES has hosted 11 workshops to identify the fundamental questions that must be answered to achieve

major advances in various energy technologies. The proposals came in response to calls issued after workshops on solar energy, hydrogen fuels, and nuclear energy.

Even if the budget is better for the 2009 fiscal year that begins on 1 October, nobody expects DOE to simply pick up where it left off. Applicants had to survive intralab competitions before submitting their proposals to

DOE, and the entire process will likely have to be repeated. What he did last year, Stocks says, "is now an enormous waste of time."

Still, many scientists say that if DOE issues a new call for use-inspired research proposals, they will answer. "If we think it's important science," Stocks says, "then of course we're going to apply."

—ADRIAN CHO

With reporting by Robert F. Service.

## NUTRITION SCIENCE

# Lancet and MSF Split Over Malnutrition Series

They both have the interests of malnourished children at heart. But in a nasty spat about a series of scientific papers, Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), the international charity, and the medical journal *The Lancet* are accusing each other of damaging that very cause. The flap, which centers on the merits of so-called ready-to-use therapeutic foods, has become so heated that Richard Horton, editor of *The Lancet*, says for now he will no longer accept articles by MSF staffers. Many outsiders are calling on the two to stop bickering and focus on the plight of malnourished children instead.

At issue is a series of five articles about undernutrition produced by a special study group led by five leading nutrition scientists. Funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the group explored the causes and consequences of malnutrition and examined the scientific evidence for various interventions. The series was unveiled at press conferences in seven cities around the world on 16 January. It is expected to have a major policy impact, for instance, at the next meeting of the United Nations System Standing Committee on Nutrition (SCN), in March in Hanoi, Vietnam.

But the package had barely gone online, along with three commentaries, when MSF staffers in Geneva, Switzerland—who had read embargoed copies of the papers—published a harsh critique on their Web site. Their core complaint is that the series devotes little attention to ready-to-use therapeutic foods. Made under names such as Plumpy'nut, these peanut-based products, high in energy and protein, can be used at home; they are widely used against severe acute malnutrition by MSF and other aid organizations, especially in emergency situations. They have

"transformed" practices, says Tido von Schoen-Angerer, head of MSF's Campaign for Access to Essential Medicines, and should be used much more widely.

"By failing to strongly endorse" that strategy, "*The Lancet* authors are undermining the support for this lifesaving intervention," MSF's statement reads. MSF decided to issue



**Food fight.** MSF contends *The Lancet* ignored the value of the ready-to-use food, like Plumpy'nut, that the group is pushing.

the statement instead of writing a letter to the editor because "we felt it was important to have a response immediately," says Von Schoen-Angerer.

But study group member Zulfiqar Bhutta of Aga Khan University in Karachi, Pakistan, says the criticism is "completely misplaced." Bhutta e-mailed *Science* a statement on behalf of the researchers that points out that one of the papers did note that treating severe malnutrition at home "is now possible and has been recommended." The problem, the statement continues, is that the authors could not identify any randomized controlled clinical trials

investigating the food's effect on mortality.

To Horton, the fact that "MSF has punctured the beginning of an advocacy campaign based on the best science" is "unforgivable." The result, he says, is that the fight, rather than child malnutrition, will get most of the attention. Horton says that *The Lancet* has "put our relationship with MSF on hold [which includes a temporary ban on papers by MSF authors] until I have a clear response about how this could have happened." He says

he has received e-mails from key MSF employees apologizing for

their organization's behavior; MSF staffers who asked not to be named confirmed to *Science* that the issue has divided the organization. Geoff Prescott, director of MSF in the Netherlands, says, "I thought the language in the statement was a bit strong."

Still, MSF has a point, says SCN Secretary Roger Shrimpton. Rigorous clinical trials in nutrition are often hard to do, especially in the areas where organizations like

MSF operate. "If we waited for randomized controlled trials for everything, we'd do only half of what we're doing," he says. However, "why MSF needs to make such a hullabaloo, I'm not quite sure," Shrimpton adds. "This is a fantastic series. It's the beginning of a process; it's not the Bible." *The Lancet* and MSF should mend fences as soon as possible, he says.

—MARTIN ENSERINK

