

EDITORIAL

## Decade of the Brain

At the 25th Canadian Congress of Neurological Sciences which was held in Banff in June 1990, there was unanimous support for a resolution urging the Government of Canada to declare the 1990s the Decade of the Brain. A draft "Decade of the Brain Act" has been prepared by the Canadian Neurological Coalition, an affiliation of more than 20 volunteer health agencies focused on a number of different neurological and psychiatric disorders.

Most readers of this Journal are well aware of the enormous impact which disorders affecting the nervous system have on our society. It has been estimated that as many as five million Canadians are directly affected by some type of neurological or psychiatric disorder. The resulting economic burden approaches 10 million dollars annually.

Stroke remains the third leading cause of death in North America. Alzheimer's disease and other neurodegenerative disorders threaten to drain our already depleted health care resources as an increasing proportion of the population enters the geriatric age group. Each year two of every 1,000 persons in Canada experiences trauma to the brain or spinal cord. Many of these people are young and in their most productive years at the time of injury and are left with major physical or mental disabilities.

Until recently it was generally assumed that there was little potential for regeneration or recovery of function following damage to the adult central nervous system. However, there have been remarkable advances in the basic neurosciences over the past 10-20 years which are changing some of these established concepts and the time is now ripe to begin to apply some of this

new knowledge to help promote regeneration and repair in the human nervous system and to assist functional recovery.

Canadian Neuroscientists have played a prominent role in some of these recent developments, and their contributions will increase substantially during the 1990s with the recognition and support provided by the Federal Government's Networks of Centres of Excellence Program. One of the 14 network proposals which has recently been approved for funding is one which will focus on Neural Regeneration and Functional Recovery. Over the next five years 25.5 million dollars will be provided to develop new research in these fields and to establish a network linking together more than 100 neuroscience investigators at 16 different Canadian Universities.

During the 1990s Canada will host three major international meetings concerned with the brain and its disorders. In August 1991, the International Brain Research Organization (IBRO) will hold the 3rd World Congress of Neuroscience in Montreal. In 1993, both the World Congress of Neurology and the International Congress of Clinical Neurophysiology will take place in Vancouver.

Legislation proclaiming the 1990s the decade of the Brain has already been enacted in the United States and in Italy. It would be most fitting for Canada to officially join a growing international movement to focus attention on neurological disorders during the 1990s. The solution will not be easy but there are grounds to be optimistic that by the end of the decade, we may see breakthroughs in the management of some of the major problems affecting the human nervous system.

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