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Bureaucrats Encroach on Science

THE public stands to be helped or harmed by the outcome of current controversies over banning of suspected cancer-causing substances, but we may be kept awhile finding out which.

There is no scientific court of last resort and perhaps there should be none. However, as government expands its control over scientific matters, bureaucrats may make the final decisions.

The present multi-sided melee has politicians, scientists of all sorts, liberal reformers, technical societies and commercial interests engaged in confusing word battles.

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) says that Laetrile, made from apricot seeds, does not fulfill claims made for it and refuses to certify it. Laetrile supporters claim it controls cancer, makes patients feel better and harms no one.

Who is right? Should people be free to take this medicine, or others, if their physicians so advise?

"Regulatory agencies, in this case FDA, offer us the worst face of science," said The Wall Street Jour-

nal in a recent editorial about Laetrile. "By filtering scientific tenets through inflexible bureaucratic logic, they squeeze out all room for common judgment."

Valproate (Dilantin) is widely used in other countries as a treatment for myoclonic epilepsy, but it is not available to more than a million Americans who suffer from this ailment.

Does eating eggs really increase danger of heart disease by raising cholesterol levels? Can the cholesterol level really be reduced by a cereal diet? Some say yes; others no.

Scientists have pointed out that almost all foods may be shown to have some degree of health risk when consumed in large quantities, urging that benefits be weighed against risks.

Calculations show that a 12-ounce bottle of diet soda contained less than one gram of cyclamate. To get an amount comparable to that which caused cancer effects in mice and rats, an adult would have to drink at least 138 bottles per

day.

A human being would have to eat over 1,500 pounds of beef liver a day to receive cancer-causing effects from DES residues like those derived from heavy feeding to laboratory rats.

A resolution approved by delegates to the American Medical Association in June said, in effect, that decisions ought not to be based on abnormally large animal doses fed in laboratory tests, but on normal human doses or equivalent animal doses.

The public has seldom been consulted in these controversies. A survey made two years ago by the Animal Health Institute brought forth such responses as:

"I only want to be told if something is definitely proven" and "We don't want rumors; we want proof."

It seems to be generally accepted that some political control in scientific areas is inevitable. Yet, many fear that excessive regulation and questionable restrictions on usage of results may hamper discovery and limit benefits of science.