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Panel clears professor involved in studies of 'close encounters'

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Boston. Harvard University has decided not to take any disciplinary action against John Mack, a professor of psychiatry at the medical school who has been carrying out studies of individuals claiming to have been abducted by extraterrestrial beings.

The university announced its decision last week after the completion of a year-long investigation of the author of the best-selling book, *Abduction: Human Encounters with Aliens*. "The process is over," said Anne Taylor, counsel for the university. "John Mack is in good standing as a member of the Harvard faculty."

Until now, the very existence of a committee appointed by Daniel Tosteson, dean of the medical school, to review Mack's UFO-related research had been kept secret. Indeed, the university did not officially confirm a review panel had been set up until the inquiry had been completed and the panel disbanded.

The university has now confirmed that the faculty committee was chaired by Arnold Reiman, professor emeritus at the medical school and former editor of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, and had been charged with looking into the "clinical care and clinical investigation" that Mack had carried out with those claiming to have been abducted by UFOs.

There had been concern, in particular, over whether Mack had been attempting to *treat* such individuals, or to *study* them, and over whether he had secured the formal permission needed to conduct research on human subjects.

According to Keren McGinty, a spokesperson for the medical school, Tosteson had emphasized to Mack that, in his enthusiasm to care for and study this group of individuals, "he should be careful not in any way to violate the high standards for the conduct of clinical practice and clinical investigation that have been the hallmark of this faculty".

Critics of the closed-door inquiry, some of whom had branded the proceedings a "witch hunt", had expressed fears that Mack's academic liberties were being trampled on. But according to McGinty, Tosteson confirmed that Mack was free "to study what he wishes and to state his conclusions without impediment".

At the same time, although Mack's academic freedom has been upheld, many feel that he has also been served public notice that his work must conform to stringent standards of both scholarship and medical practice. Neither Mack nor his lawyer, Eric MacLeish, has commented on the university's decision to set up a review committee, or on its outcome. Steve Nadis

In collaboration

SIR — The letter from J. Sylvan Katz and Diana Hicks (*Nature* 375, 99; 1995) underlines some of the reasons why the Burroughs Wellcome Fund, a non-profit foundation in North Carolina, United States, provides approximately \$1.3 million each year to support international and domestic collaborations among scientists.

In response to the need for scientists to exchange views with and obtain research techniques from colleagues in other countries, the Wellcome Trust in England and the Burroughs Wellcome Fund created in 1979 an exchange programme called Wellcome Research Travel Grants. Intended to advance medical science by speeding the transfer of knowledge and skills, the grants provide US and UK researchers in the health sciences with travel and subsistence support for periods ranging from 2 weeks to 6 months. More than \$100,000 in grants was awarded in 1994.

Other fund award programmes to support international and domestic collaborations include the Hitchings-Elion Fellowships, which provide US scientists early in their careers with training in the United Kingdom, and visiting professorships. They also enable researchers from the United States and elsewhere to spend time at US medical schools, universities and other non-profit research institutes. The Hitchings-Elion Fellowships enable postdoctoral fellows to work in a UK laboratory for 2 years and return to the United States for the third year of the award. More than \$900,000 was awarded in 1994 for these scientists.

The Wellcome Trust, our sister foundation and the world's largest medical charity, also provides substantial support for a variety of other programmes that foster international collaborations.

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Popov and Marconi

SIR — In this centenary year of wireless, Oerst G. Vendik is justified in commemorating Popov as a pioneering physicist and electrical engineer¹. Nevertheless, his portrayal of Popov's achievements, distorted by their dissociation from historical context, perpetuates the controversy engendered by the Soviet authorities in 1945 about who invented radio. The question of Popov's contribution to radio was comprehensively and objectively examined by Susskind² in 1962. The conclusions were: (1) According to the criteria of priority of