

SPOTTED

# Spotted: Sexist scientist; pricey problem

BY KATIE MOISSE

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## WEEK OF JUNE 8<sup>TH</sup>

### Sexist scientist

**Tim Hunt**, the Nobel Laureate whose sexist comments about female scientists **sparked a Twitter firestorm** earlier this week, has **resigned as honorary professor** at University College London. Hunt, 72, helped to discover how cells divide. And he apparently had trouble keeping himself together around women. “Three things happen when they are in the lab,” he **told a room full of journalists** at a conference in South Korea. “You fall in love with them, they fall in love with you, and when you criticize them they cry.” The **response from female researchers** was swift. “I am in the office, but I can’t do my science work as I saw a photograph of Tim Hunt and now I’m in love, dammit,” tweeted **Sophie Scott**, professor of cognitive neuroscience at University College London.

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### Pricey problem

American scientists **blow about \$28 billion a year** on biomedical research that can’t be replicated, according to a study published Tuesday in *PLoS One*. The problem stems largely from poor materials, flawed study design and shoddy data analysis. **Leonard Freedman**, founding president of the Global Biological Standards Institute and author of the study, hopes the findings will **motivate researchers to be more careful**. “The message is less about, ‘Oh my god, we’re flushing \$20 billion down the toilet,’ and more about, ‘Here is an opportunity to increase efficiencies to get more bang for the buck,’” he told *Nature*. The sobering news comes less than a month after researchers from four labs were **unable to reproduce the findings** of a 2012 study in which bone marrow transplants eased symptoms of Rett syndrome in mice.

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### Suramin in San Diego

The first-ever **trial of the antimicrobial drug suramin** in children with autism is set to start in San

Diego, California. The drug — which is used to treat African sleeping sickness — **alleviates autism symptoms** in a mouse model of the disorder. But its mechanism in the brain is unclear, and its **side effects serious**. Researchers are recruiting 20 boys with autism between the ages of 4 and 17 for preliminary tests of the treatment.

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## Powerful partnerships

An editorial published Wednesday in *Science Translational Medicine* highlights the potential of ‘**patient-centered research**’ — projects that partner scientists with the people they aim to help. The piece invokes powerful examples from the HIV/AIDS community from some 30 years ago. The authors, **Margaret Anderson** and **K. Kimberly McCleary**, say it’s time for other fields to get on board. “Think of the potential we have to capitalize on the blockbuster that is patient engagement,” they write. “The possibilities are endless.” The patient-centered approach is gaining steam, with **special funds earmarked** for projects that put people with disorders in decision-making positions.

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## Special trips

With summer upon us, we’d like to highlight a neat little company featured in *The New York Times* travel section on Wednesday that helps families with special needs plan vacations. A mother named Meghann Harris, whose 8-year-old daughter Eliza has the autism-linked disorder Rett syndrome, founded the firm **SpecialGlobe.com**. “I knew from my own personal experience that there were not a lot of resources out there for parents like me who wanted to travel,” Harris wrote **in a description of the company** on its website. “Planning a trip would take days of curating information specific to Eliza’s needs and the thought of being out there in the world alone with my two kids was terrifying.” Harris sees SpecialGlobe.com as a one-stop shop for parents of children with physical and cognitive challenges in search of a stress-free getaway.

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