

# Army May Drop Drug Test Funds

By Bill Richards

Washington Post Staff Writer

The Army may drop its funding of a controversial program of disease experiments on Maryland prisoners, federal officials said yesterday.

Citing "research priorities and monetary and contractual reasons," an Army legal official handling the program said it may have to be terminated when three current contracts expire next year.

"The final decision hasn't been made yet," said Capt. Jan Shikitka, a legal officer for the program, "but we have alerted the people at the University of Maryland Medical School that we may have to pull out."

Federal officials involved with the program said yesterday that the current controversy over the military's biological and chemical testing programs on human volunteers was not involved in the decision to drop the program.

Instead, they said, the final decision would be based on the availability of both funds and experienced researchers available to the project.

Shikitka said the Army has been negotiating with officials from the medical school, which administers the program, for the last month over renewal of the contracts.

The Army has funded experiments on thousands of prisoners at the Maryland House of Correction since the program began in 1956. The prisoners have been exposed to a variety of diseases including typhoid fever, cholera, malaria, Rocky Mountain spotted fever and tularemia.

During the last several years the program has drawn sharp criticism from prison reform groups who contend that there are overt and subtle pressures on prisoners to take part in the program that would not be present on test subjects outside the prison system.

The American Civil Liberties Union's National Prison Project chose the Maryland project to zero in their objections in a \$1.25-million damage suit filed last year. The suit, which is the first court attempt to end non-therapeutic experiments on prisoners, is still in litigation, Army and ACLU officials said yesterday.

Copies of Army contracts for the program with the medical school, which were made available to The Post, indicate that Army officials last year called for continuation of the program despite the criticism of prisoner experiments.

"It represents the only immediately available source of

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volunteers to (Army) investigators since the all-volunteer Army has eliminated the WHITECOAT volunteer program," a 1974 research proposal prepared by the Army said.

The WHITECOAT program was one in which conscientious objectors were used by the Army in its biological research programs during the 1960s and early 1970s.

The prisoner program has been funded and run by Army research officials from Ft. Detrick. Until it was disbanded under a 1970 presidential order, Detrick was the Army biological warfare headquarters. The program is now being run by the Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases, which is still at Detrick.

Army officials said yesterday that the prisoner program is used to develop vaccines for various diseases and does not involve offensive biological research.

Arpiar G. Saunders Jr., an attorney for the National Prison Project, said yesterday that about 3,500 prisoners had been involved in the program during the last 10 years and that the Army had spent about \$200,000 annually to conduct the experiments.

A separate program involving disease research by the Department of Health, Education and Welfare on prisoners at the Patuxent Institution in Maryland is not connected with the military experimentation, Maryland officials said yesterday.

Dr. Richard B. Hornick, director of the infectious disease program at Jessup, said that no formal notification had been made yet by the Army that it is dropping out of the program.

"We know they are looking at priorities," said Hornick, who has directed the prisoner program for 15 years, "and right now we're in the process of trying to negotiate it."