LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Brains and births

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The Biobank brain collection is a direct beneficiary of the University of São Paulo’s link with the city’s postmortem investigation service. The collection, which includes over 3,000 specimens donated by relatives of deceased patients, has enabled advances in fields such as Alzheimer’s disease.

Psychiatric disorders often associated with Alzheimer’s disease could result from neurological damage typical of early stages of the disease, according to the analysis of 455 samples from the database. Previous research has suggested that depression and anxiety, which often accompany aging, could increase the risk of the development of Alzheimer’s disease. Given that common symptoms, such as memory loss and dementia, only manifest years after the onset of neurological damage, a link to other psychiatric disorders could be useful for diagnosing Alzheimer’s disease.

When diagnosed early, patients benefit more from existing treatments and could help test new drugs, as described in the cover story of this issue. Images of the Brazilian National Museum in flames shocked the world. The 200-year-old institution, housed in a former imperial palace, was home to plants and animals collected during nineteenth-century expeditions throughout Brazil, mummies and minerals gathered by the Portuguese royal family, prehistoric fossils and meteorites, and artifacts of extinct indigenous peoples.

The São Cristóvão Palace was the main exhibition center, but the museum complex spreads across the Quinta da Boa Vista park. Thus, the fire in September 2018 affected different collections in different ways, sparing approximately 10% of the exhibits. The herbarium remained undamaged, while the archaeology, paleontology and geology sections suffered immense losses, as did the zoology department. The October 2018 special issue of Pesquisa FAPESP was entirely dedicated to the museum, with an overview of the collections and activities at the institution. In this international issue, we reproduce a brief history of the museum (page 28).