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September 27, 1983

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Dear Fritz,

After a recent trip to Europe I have become concerned that some people are under the impression that I believe AIDS is caused by HTLV. I am writing to you because of your central position in viral oncology in Europe, and I hope you will help me to dispel this impression when it comes up. My opinion is simply this: Of the known candidates, it's a pretty good one based on conceptual grounds. When it comes to data proving the point, the results are stimulating for more studies, but clearly not definitive for any one virus. I feel we are in a good position perhaps the best position to be able to rule out a family of retroviruses in this disease in the coming year, or provide indications that they remain important candidates. In my opinion an HTLV variant is the most likely candidate, and if it isn't this, it is an as yet unknown virus.

There are a number of new interesting features about HTLV relating to the possibility of immune suppression. For example, we now know that following immortalization of normal human functional T-cells, the immortalized cells lose all their immunological functions. There's further evidence that some normal human T-cells infected by HTLV, and for some reason not transformed, die when they meet some other HTLV antigen-positive clones. The latter observations are the results of Sam Broder at NCI. Overall, there still remains much to be done. I have never seen the virus that Luc Montagnier has described, and I suspect he might have a mixture of two. On the other hand, some of his data are interesting but still far from definitive. We have a total now of ten HTLV isolates from frank AIDS cases in approximately 40 attempts, and again, I'm still not certain what this means.

I hope to see you sometime in the near future so we can discuss this in more detail.

Kind regards.

Sincerely yours,

Robert C. Gallo

RCG:tas