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FRANCE

Dear Jean:

I want to follow up on my last letter to you because I just received the communique from Claudine. I like it and I will go forward based on your initiatives. However, I am leaving for a ten-day trip to India. As soon as I return (February 23), I will call Claudine and write to both of you. In the meantime, I want to tell you how hurt I am by the ridiculous questions about one of our earliest mass-produced viruses. These questions have to do with the origin of this one isolate and also what we did with the one virus Montagnier sent to us.

I believe that the best I can do is to send you (and Jean Dausset) the enclosure. Please note well that at the time we mass-produced HTLV-III, what we call strain B2 which is the one isolate similar to but far from identical to LAV₁ (150 nucleotide differences), we had 48 isolates—not one-of HTLV-III. This was published (Gallo et al Science May 1984). Please note also that at precisely the same time we also mass produced another isolate called HTLV-III_{RF} (also known as HTLV-III_{HAT} because it was our first isolate from a Haitian patient). This was also published at the same time and molecularly cloned at the same time, and it differs from LAV₁ by about 950 nucleotides (10% of the genome). This is a greater difference from LAV₁ than any known isolate of this family of viruses! Also you should be aware that this very different isolate was also immediately patented by the U.S. Government.

I was once asked what we did with Montagnier's virus. Please remember that Montagnier did not have a virus-producing cell line until July 1984. What he sent us was an extremely small amount of virus particles present in media from a temporarily infected dying T-cell. What we did is what we were supposed to do. We temporarily transmitted the virus to human fresh blood T-cells (which soon die) to confirm it was a virus. We also determined that the particles had some reverse transcriptase-like activity and, therefore, confirmed that it was probably a retrovirus. (However, the amount was so small we could not characterize the enzyme.) We also showed that it did not immunologically cross-react substantially with HTLV-I or HTLV-II. Therefore, we confirmed it was likely a unique retrovirus. Remember that at this period

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(October 1983) almost no one believed the small amount of published data then available. Remember also we had many of our own isolates at this time which we were trying to characterize. We now knew only that they had something interesting, but note that they reported that their virus cross-reacted with HTLV-I (see their original Science paper). We did not confirm this. Later they found that result to be an artifact. We did nothing more with this virus which they stated could not be grown in a permanent cell line which is, of course, exactly what we succeeded in doing with several of our isolates of HTLV-III. Also, they reported that patient sera reacted only with p24 (p25), the core protein of the virus, and never to the envelope. To the contrary, we found that the major antibody in patients' sera was to the envelope, although many (but not all) sera also react with the p24. Also Montagnier reported as late as November 1983 that only 20% of AIDS patients' sera had detectable antibodies to their virus. In our earliest work with HTLV-III sera testing we obtained 90% to 100% of sera of AIDS patients positive. We were, therefore, not 100% sure that what they found was what we were proving was the cause of AIDS.

Finally, I think it was unusual for Montagnier to write to Nature at this time stating he had sent us his virus. Of course we acknowledge this, and at the same time and long before we had sent him HTLV-I, HTLV-II, T-cell growth factor (T-2), and reagents against HTLV-I and HTLV-II. We did not write letters to this effect.

I apologize for burdening you with all of this, but I am concerned and hurt by periodic newspaper articles from certain writers that I do not know what to do about. I hope, in any case, some of this information is helpful in clarifying a strange problem.

With kind regards.

Sincerely yours,



Robert C. Gallo, M.D.

CG/bj

enclosure

Madame Escoffier-Lambiotte

S. I have sent a similar letter to Jean Dausset.