

National Institutes of Health
National Cancer Institute
Bethesda, Maryland 20892

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Dr. Peter Fischinger
AIDS Coordinator - FHS
Department of Health
and Human Services

Dear Peter:

I wish to share with you my serious concerns respecting the recent German book entitled, AIDS: vom Molekul zur Pandemie, authored by one Michael G. Koch. At first glance, the work appears only to be a popularized picture-book about the AIDS crisis; initial translations, however, reveal that Herr Koch has adopted and is spreading some of the more pernicious lies about the work undertaken at our laboratories and the integrity of both the scientists here and the Department itself.

Koch's libels fall into three principal areas. I will review each in turn.

1. On page 95 of the book, Koch blatantly accuses members of Dr. Gallo's laboratory of altering documents in a ludicrous effort to make something sinister out of the openly acknowledged fact that Dr. Montagnier's laboratory sent samples of LAV to our laboratory on two occasions in 1983. As you will recall, in February 1987, the Pasteur Institute lawyers, as a part of the Freedom of Information Act litigation, were prepared to make precisely the same claim about altered documents. The facts are these:

NIH received the first two shipments of LAV supernatant in July 1983. Mika Popovic unsuccessfully attempted to culture this sample. In addition, other scientists in the same laboratory, F. Wong-Staal, Dr. Sarin and co-workers, failed to find any biochemical indications for the presence of virus in the cultures. As a result, Dr. Montagnier's laboratory sent a second sample of supernatant which was received on September 21, 1983. Again, attempts at long-term propagation were apparently unsuccessful.

In the late fall of 1983, Popovic sent samples of these and other cultures to Matthew Gonda, the head of the Electron Microscopy Laboratory at the Frederick Cancer Research Facility, so electromicrographs could be taken of the samples. Gonda reported back by letter dated December 14, 1983, and noted that two of the samples showed "lentivirus infection." This indicated that some of the Montagnier, et al. LAV was present in the samples. Consistent with proper scientific protocol, these results were discussed with Dr. Montagnier's laboratory.

During the course of the Pasteur Institute FOIA turn-over, the Pasteur Institute received a copy of the Gonda letter with the two indications of "antivirus infection" deleted. This was not from Dr. Gallo's laboratory and possibly not from anyone in the U.S. Government. On February 9, 1987, lawyers for the Pasteur Institute were going to move for production of the original NIH documents on the basis of this alteration. The motion was never made because of the settlement between the parties.

The Koch book superimposes a copy of the altered letter over a copy of the original, with the significant lines highlighted in yellow. The text implies that the alterations were made in Dr. Gallo's laboratory in order to cover up the importance of the LAV sent by Montagnier. As you can see, the allegation is ridiculous as: 1) it would serve no purpose (Dr. Gallo Confirmed that they had a retrovirus, and told them so many times between October 1983 and January 1984; 2) because U.S. Health Department officials have the material Dr. Gallo's laboratory submitted and they are not altered; and 3) it is wrong for many other reasons as well. Even the Pasteur Institute scientists and lawyers have known all along that the altered document did not come from Dr. Gallo's laboratory — unaltered copies still exist in their proper places here.

2. Koch's second attack, on page 96, is based on a letter Dr. Gallo wrote to Dr. Peter-Hans Hofschneider and a few other European colleagues on September 27, 1983. In that letter, (which he reproduces), Dr. Gallo stated, "I have never seen the virus that Luc Montagnier has described." Again, Koch has highlighted this line and asserts that Dr. Gallo simply lied to discredit Montagnier. Of course, if you will refer back to the chronology set out above, in late September 1983 only the results from the July shipment of LAV were available, and there was nothing to "see" in those samples. In fact, what Dr. Gallo really conveyed was that his laboratory had not seen exactly what Montagnier described in his only publication on the subject at that time, namely the finding of a new retrovirus but one which cross-reacted with HTLV-1. When Dr. Gallo saw a new retrovirus (later to be proven to be the AIDS virus), it did not cross-react with HTLV-1. Ironically, the entire tone of Dr. Gallo's letter was to gain support for Montagnier's and his own ideas that a retrovirus was the likely cause of AIDS.
3. Koch's final defamation centers on a gross distortion of certain collaborative studies Dr. Gallo undertook with the Japanese concerning HTLV-I. Koch implies that Dr. Gallo bullied the Japanese out a rightful claim to the discovery of the virus and, uses this lie to buttress the others set out above.

HTLV-I is a leukemia-causing retrovirus which was isolated by Dr. Gallo and his team in 1978, first orally reported in 1979, and first published in 1980, and was the first human retrovirus so isolated. Although that team isolated the virus here, its victims are rare in the United States. In contrast, victims of HTLV-I are far more common in the Caribbean and in Southwestern Japan.

Dr. Gallo travelled to Japan to set up collaborative studies in an area where we found the virus was more common.

In 1981, after the Gallo team had already published five papers on HTLV-I in peer-reviewed journals, a Japanese team isolated the same virus, but called it ATLIV. One Japanese scientist was (perhaps quite naturally) eager to claim the discovery of a different substance, but studies irrefutably showed that HTLV-I and ATLIV were one and the same. The Japanese realized that there was no basis on which to differentiate between HTLV-I and ATLIV, and agreed that their virus should be called HTLV-I both in a letter they wrote to Science in 1983 and at the Cold Spring Harbor Conference that same year.

In addition, on page 97, Koch has published a chart, graphically setting forth the above libels, which are highlighted in pink. This pictorial libel compounds the harm caused by the falsehoods in the text.

In sum, Koch has taken tired fabrications and has reworked them into new libels in a book which oddly enough takes much of its data, figures, and other support from Dr. Gallo's own publications (adding insult to injury). Koch's book seriously undermines the work of this laboratory and the international collaboration so necessary to AIDS research. Moreover, Koch jeopardizes the international goodwill and repose which has come from the settlement between the French Government and NIH, if not the settlement itself.

Accordingly, I think it is vital that HHS in cooperation with the French, insist that Koch's story be told in a more evenhanded manner. Surely the damaging libels I have set out in this letter should be deleted from any further printings, and the truth about the cooperation between the French and the Americans, as set out in our joint publications, should be made known to Koch and his publishers worldwide.

Sincerely yours,


Robert C. Gallo

RCG/es