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Is HIV in Our Genes?



Now There's a Question Worth Asking

A small minority of researchers think that HIV may not be a foreign body that causes AIDS after being introduced in a human. Rather, the virus may be produced by our own bodies when our genetic material is broken down by other toxins. (ABCNEWS.com)

By Nicholas Regush
ABCNEWS.com



Surprise is a word that flows off scientific lips like water off a penguin's tail.

It's a word I hear much too often when interviewing scientists and physicians.

"The results really surprised me" is one of the most common exclamations in medical science. At these auspicious moments, I often sit there nonplussed, thinking, "Why is this researcher so surprised? Did he not consider the wider possibilities of the available science? Did she not read the two decades' worth of alternative thinking on this subject?"

Not all surprises are signs of incomplete scientific homework, but often expressions of surprise in science are a dead giveaway that Joe or Sally have been (how can I put it gently?) sucking on their fingers rather than tracking where their fingers may be pointing.

Just a Theory?

Which brings me to the final chapter (for now) in my series on HIV and AIDS, an area of scientific inquiry where the players suck their fingers more often than wired members of a baseball team spit during a playoff game. (Anyone not clear on this image might tune in to next week's Yankees-Braves World Series for at least one inning.)

In This Series

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Expressions of surprise in science are often a dead giveaway that Joe or Sally have been sucking on their fingers rather than tracking where their fingers may be pointing.

At some time — perhaps in a matter of a few years — the science on AIDS may finally begin to write off the theory that HIV is a virus that attacks people like a bullet from hell. In fact, what we call HIV could be a product of the body’s own genetic material.

Try to imagine the process this way: Each one of us carries genetic remnants of ancient infections in our genome. These remnants are usually referred to as human endogenous retroviruses or HERVs.

It’s now recognized that HERVs are likely involved in a number of biological processes, including the way cells in the body differentiate. There is also preliminary evidence that HERVs may be involved in some disease processes that affect the body’s immune system.

HIV Could Be Harmless

There is also evidence that HERVs can be activated by a variety of factors such as chemicals, radiation and viruses potentially to form infectious particles. In other words, if cells get damaged by toxic insults, HERVs may be awakened from their ancient slumber. HIV may well be a byproduct of that type of cellular damage.

If this turns out to be the case, should it be a surprise? No. A careful scrutiny of the substantial HERV literature suggests this is a distinct possibility. It would only be a surprise because AIDS researchers have become far too fixated on one theory of what HIV is.

Let’s take this to the next step. If HIV is indeed produced inside our bodies, does this automatically mean it is the cause of AIDS? No, we shouldn’t assume anything of the sort. It may well be that a human-produced “HIV” is pretty much harmless.

The HIV antibody test might simply be picking up on human-produced “HIV” material. In this case, a positive test would mean that cells of the body had been sufficiently damaged to generate a reaction. A positive test would be a marker of disease — not necessarily that “HIV” is the cause of AIDS.

Consider — and Debate — All Theories

As I indicated in last week’s column, there are a variety of theories about how AIDS might develop, theories foolishly ignored by the scientific mainstream. These are theories that should be widely debated.

Let me end bluntly: If HIV turns out to be human-produced and relatively harmless genetic material, would I be surprised? No, I would not.

And should AIDS scientists be surprised if a



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breakthrough in this direction occurs? No, they should not — certainly not if they have diligently read the wide variety of scientific opinion that focuses on AIDS. ■



Nicholas Regush produces medical features for ABCNEWS. In his weekly column, published Wednesdays, he looks at medical trouble spots, heralds innovative achievements and analyzes health trends that may greatly influence our lives. His latest book is [The Breaking Point: Understanding Your Potential for Violence](#).

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