

July 5, 1984

Robert Gallo, M.D.
National Cancer Institute
Lab of Tumor Cell Biology
Bldg. 37, Room 6A09
Bethesda, MD 20205

Dear Bob,

It was good to reestablish some communications during our telephone call last Thursday. I agree with you that many of our disagreements over the past months have been over perceptions - mine and yours. After we talked, however, I did not feel you understood mine and, most likely, I did not completely understand yours. Because I want you to understand how I perceived what went on, I am writing some of them down on paper. The major stimulus for this was your comment that people at CDC put institutional good over their own good when making important decisions. There is some truth to your assessment, but at a point, at least for me, what is right takes precedence over any institutional commitment. And, indeed, supporting the French scientists in the AIDS issue was, for me, something that was right - far and above any institutional issue.

There were three major time periods during which pertinent information was developed which made up much of my perception that led me to disagree with you: June to February 1983, February 1983 to your news conference, and your news conference to now.

June to February 1983. As you and I agree, the Institut Pasteur group first identified the probable AIDS agent in early 1983, but I, like you, viewed the initial description with some caution. I, also like you, started some collaborative work to ensure that nothing of importance was missed. I kept communications open and began sharing specimens with them beginning in the summer of 1983. They had developed a serologic test and on the first collaborative study had identified antibodies in some sera parallel to what Max had found. Montagnier announced this at Cold Springs Harbor in September. We then received LAV for animal inoculation and sent more blinded serum to them for testing. By the first of the year, it was evident that their antigen scored well in identifying AIDS and LAS sera and soon thereafter we realized, looking back, that we had LAV-like agents growing in our cell cultures for some time. Chermann then brought us LAV for experimental purposes in February and we rapidly confirmed essentially everything that they had described including the use of LAV as a target antigen for both ELISA and RIP serologic assays.

February 1983 to your news conference. By late March we had developed a competitive radioimmunoassay and soon thereafter, had shown that our isolates from US AIDS patients were indistinguishable from the prototype LAV from France. Simultaneously, we shared serum with you and the French and had run the same serum in our lab. At that time, I think, it was clear to all of us

3/26/84

that the cause had been found and we set up the meeting in Paris on 5-6 April. There I tried my best to keep all parties together (including Max) so that no one would feel short changed. My purpose was primarily to keep the 4 groups together so that the forecasted attacks from those opposing the etiologic link could be easily handled in a coordinated way. In Paris I tried to tell you all. I opened our print outs on the serologic results and showed you my summaries. Unfortunately, I understand from you, I did not succeed since you still don't feel that those data have been shared. But I tried to show you that either isolate, when used as a target antigen, scored similarly. Also, I tried to show you EMs, gels, and FA results which suggested that CDC isolates were the same as the French. Upon return, I tried to reinforce the fact that probably what you had, what we had and what the French had were the same. Jim Curran did the same and encouraged you to complete comparisons before making any broad announcement. On the Sunday before your press conference, I tried again to show you that the bugs were probably the same. I reviewed the competitive RIA results with you in some detail. The reasons we wanted comparisons done before any announcement were several. First, the additive effect of the combined data strengthened the etiologic association. Second, having one causative agent was far better than having two in terms of simplicity. And third, having a single cause would avoid any division between the 4 groups regarding whose cause is the best.

Press conference to now. The lack of pre-announcement comparison, the lack of substantial mention of the French work at the press conference, and the minimum of credit given the French at subsequent talks and interviews, made it look like you wanted to be given credit for first identifying the cause of AIDS.

Thus, the perception (and I agree, Bob, it is perception) by me was that you did not want to give due credit to the French. There is no doubt that your lab's findings have been paramount and in many ways have been subjugated to second place by the controversy around who found the agent first. As you point out, the first finding is often not the most important finding, but before one moves on to claim importance of current work, one is obligated to give credit to previous work. I perceived that you were actively trying to violate that obligation. Your comment in Paris, regarding my suggestion that someone from the Institut Pasteur be invited to Sendai, reinforced that perception. Unfortunately, your negative response may have been more to me than to the French and, I'm sorry, I did not pick that up.

Anyway, my defense of the French has been because I perceived that they were not being given the credit that I knew they were due. It was not to defend the CDC, nor put the CDC in the lime light, nor to put NOI down. Although CDC has been in the virologic pursuit of AIDS from the very beginning, we did not describe the cause first and the French did. Through very careful work, this small group found the cause of AIDS before your group or ours. I would rather, naturally, that our group was the first. But it wasn't and I admit it. I am happy to see that you are doing the same. If you were doing it all along, I'm sorry for the fuss. I did not want any fuss. But I PERCEIVED you were not and I thought that was wrong.

3/24/92

I sincerely hope the scars of the past months are transient. We will continue to work together, no doubt, but I would prefer that our friendship survive regardless of any work-related problems.

Sincerely,

Donald P. Francis M.D., D.Sc.

2/25/92