



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Public Health Service

Washington DC 20201

May 9, 1984

Dear Colleague:

You have no doubt read of the exciting developments with respect to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome: isolation in AIDS patients of a cytopathic retrovirus variant of the Human T-cell Leukemic Virus (HTLV-III). Enclosed is a copy of the Secretary's statement at the April 23rd press conference announcing this development, as well as the Science papers containing the reports.

Sincerely,

GRO-C

J. M. McGinnis, M.D.  
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Health  
Director, Office of Disease Prevention  
and Health Promotion

Enclosures

*Mrs. Coughlin 6.6.1984.*

*Dr. Sumitran has asked for a p/c  
of these papers for her file;  
afterwards please put originals  
in our 'Aids' file.*

GRO-C

*16/8/84.*

STATEMENT BY SECRETARY HECKLER

April 23, 1984

On June 14th of last year -- about ten months ago -- I traveled to Denver to tell the United States Conference of Mayors that I had made the conquest of AIDS the federal government's number-one health priority.

I told the Mayors and the American people that this awesome medical problem was "a disease with two names." One was "AIDS," Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. The other was "Fear."

In the intervening months, public education and public understanding have substantially reduced the incidence of fear. The panic which, for a time, began to spread through American cities has quieted.

Today I am proud to announce that the arrow of funds, medical personnel, research and experimentation which the Department of Health and Human Services and its allies around the world have aimed and fired at the disease AIDS has hit the target.

Only two or three rings away from the bulls-eye.

Here are the specifics:

First -- the probable cause of AIDS has been found -- a variant of a known human cancer virus, called HTLV-III.

Second -- not only has the agent been identified, but a new process has been developed to mass produce this virus. This discovery is equally crucial because it enables us, for the first time, to characterize the agent in detail and to understand its behavior.

Third -- With discovery of both the virus and this new process, we now have a blood test for AIDS which we hope can be widely available within about six months. We have applied for the patent on this process today.

With the blood test, we can now identify AIDS victims with essentially 100 percent certainty. Thus, we should be able to ensure that blood for transfusion is free from AIDS. We should be able to prevent transfusion-related AIDS cases, as well as those which might appear in hemophiliacs.

We will also be able to promptly and easily diagnose people who may have been infected by the virus, and perhaps develop ways to prevent the full syndrome from occurring.

Finally -- we also believe that the new process will enable us to develop a vaccine to prevent AIDS. We hope to have such a vaccine ready for testing in about two years.

The credit for these discoveries belongs to many people. Under the leadership of the Public Health Service, many scientists, both inside and outside the government and around the world, have given their time, their dedication, their genius to solving this puzzle.

In particular, credit should go to Dr. Robert Gallo, chief of the NCI Laboratory of Tumor Cell Biology, who directed the research that produced this discovery; to Dr. Edward Brandt, the Assistant Secretary for Health, who has led the PHS-wide effort; to Dr. Vincent DeVita, Director of the National Cancer Institute; and to Drs. James Mason and James Curran of the Centers for Disease Control.

And as is so often the case in scientific pursuit, other discoveries have occurred in different laboratories -- even in different parts of the world -- which will ultimately contribute to the goal we all seek: the conquest of AIDS. I especially want to cite the efforts of the Pasteur Institute in France, which has in part been working in collaboration with the National Cancer Institute. They have previously identified a virus which they have linked to AIDS patients, and within the next few weeks we will know with certainty whether that virus is the same one identified through the NCI's work. We believe it will prove to be the same.



I also want to clear up any misunderstandings about these discoveries which have resulted from news reports published before the full import of NCI's work had been shared. That work is described in the four articles in "Science" magazine which are being released today.

The NCI work provides the proof we need that the cause of AIDS has been found. It does this because it goes beyond the simple identification of a particular virus. The special value of the NCI work is that it has developed the process to mass reproduce the virus. Without that ability, we could not be sure of the characteristics of the virus in question -- in short, whether it truly demonstrated the behavior which was a plausible cause of AIDS. Furthermore, without that process, we could not move ahead to the all-important advances in diagnosis, prevention and ultimately treatment.

That is why today's announcement, embodied in the articles by Dr. Gallo's team, are so crucial.

Today's discovery represents the triumph of science over a dreaded disease. Those who have disparaged this scientific search -- those who have said we weren't doing enough -- have not understood how sound, solid, significant medical research proceeds.

-- And we must, without surcease, continue the hunt for effective therapy for those already afflicted by this disease.

All of these tasks will be pursued with the same zeal, brilliance and tenacity which have brought discovery of the virus HTLV-III.

Today we add another miracle to the long honor roll of American medicine and science. Yet another terrible disease is about to yield to patience, persistence and outright genius.

To Dr. Gallo and all his colleagues and allies in and outside the Department of Health and Human Services who have given so many hours of caring and hard work to make possible today's achievement and the achievements that still lie ahead, I offer the thanks and gratitude of the American people.