September 28, 1983

Professor Dr. Harald zur Hausen
Director, Cancer Institute
Heidelberg,
West Germany

Dear Harald,

After a recent trip to Europe I have become concerned that some people
are under the impression that I believe AIDS is caused by HTLV. I am
writing to you because of your central position in viral oncology in
Europe, and I hope you will help me to dispel this impression when it
comes up.✳ My opinion is simply this: Of the known candidates, it's a
pretty good one based on conceptual grounds. When it comes to data
proving the point, the results are stimulating for more studies, but
clearly not definitive for any one virus. I feel we are in a good posi-
tion perhaps the best position to be able to rule out a family of retro- ⊂
viruses in this disease in the coming year, or provide indications that
they remain important candidates. In my opinion an HTLV variant is the
most likely candidate, and if it isn't this, it is an as yet unknown
virus.

There are a number of new interesting features about HTLV relating to the
possibility of immune suppression. For example, we now know that follow-
ing immortalization of normal human functional T-cells, the immortalized
cells lose all their immunological functions. There's further evidence
that some normal human T-cells infected by HTLV, and for some reason not
transformed, die when they meet some other HTLV antigen-positive clones.
The latter observations are the results of Sam Broder at NCI. Overall,
there still remains much to be done. I have never seen the virus that
Luc Montagnier has described, and I suspect he might have a mixture of
two. On the other hand, some of his data are interesting but still far
from definitive. We have a total now of ten HTLV isolates from frank
AIDS cases in approximately 40 attempts, and again, I'm still not certain
what this means.

I hope to see you sometime in the near future so we can discuss this in
more detail.

Kind regards.

Sincerely yours,

Robert C. Gallo

RCG:tas

✳ There are 3 a 4 other groups with a much more
current positive viewpoint.