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SANTA BARBARA • SANTA CRUZ

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
Department of Microbiology
and Immunology

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA 94143

April 26, 1985

Dr. J. Michael Bishop
Director, Hooper Foundation
HSW 1542

Dear Mike:

As Chairman of the Retrovirus Study Group of the ICTV, I have recently assembled a group of retrovirologists to find a suitable species name for the group of retrovirus isolates believed likely to represent the causative agents of the acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS). All members of the committee have been asked to make and solicit specific proposals, but I am writing to you, as one of the leaders in the field of animal virology, either to make a formal proposal (according to the enclosed guidelines) or to express your opinions about the some of the issues that have been raised.

In particular, are there names for this group of viruses that you find particularly inappropriate, and why? Do you believe that use of the term "AIDS" in the name would present serious problems with respect to patient-physician relations or the establishment of cause? (If so, how would those problems differ from those posed by the use of the term "polio" in poliovirus?) How important is it to avoid any potentially confusing abbreviations (e.g., "HAV" for "human AIDS virus" and "hepatitis A virus")? What taxonomic and other features do you feel are most compelling in the design of a species name? Should names as complex as human T cell lymphotropic III/lymphadenopathy virus (HTLV-III/LAV) be allowed? Would they be used? Do you feel a compelling consensus for any single name has already been reached among virologists, clinicians, or laymen?

Be assured that any comments you can forward to me on these topics before May 15th will be distributed to our members and helpful in our deliberations.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Harold".

Harold E. Varmus, M.D.
American Cancer Society
Professor of Molecular Virology

HEV/jm
Enclosures