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REPORT OF THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR
TO THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE WESTERN PACIFIC
JULY 1985 TO JUNE 1986

The Regional Director has the honour to transmit to the Regional Committee for the Western Pacific, for its information, a document concerning the endorsement by the International Committee on the Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV) of the use of the name "human immunodeficiency virus" (HIV) to designate the retrovirus implicated as the cause of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

The International Committee on the Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV) has endorsed the use of the name "human immunodeficiency virus" (HIV) to designate the retrovirus implicated as the cause of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). This name will be used henceforth in all WHO publications and documents.¹ The name should be written out in full upon its first mention in a given text. The abbreviation may be used thereafter. The names "lymphadenopathy-associated virus" (LAV), "human T-cell lymphotropic virus type III" (HTLV-III), and the combined abbreviation LAV/HTLV-III, should no longer be used.

ICTV has recommended only an English vernacular name for the virus. The French and Spanish names recommended by WHO are "virus de l'immunodéficience humaine" and "virus de la inmunodeficiencia humana", respectively.

ICTV has taken into consideration the following issues that bear upon this proposal.²

1. The name conforms to the common nomenclature for retroviruses, beginning with the host species "human", ending with "virus", and containing a word that denotes a major (but not the only) pathogenic property of the prototypic member of the group - "immunodeficiency".

2. Although the name clearly connects the virus to the disease with which the virus group is associated, it does not incorporate the term "AIDS", which many clinicians recommend should be avoided.

3. The name is readily distinguished from all existing names for this group of viruses and has been chosen without regard to priority of discovery.

4. The name is sufficiently distinct from the names of other retroviruses to imply an independent virus species, a group of isolates that can presumably exchange genetic information readily with each other but not with members of other known retrovirus species.

5. Retroviruses isolated from subhuman primates and found to be genetically related and biologically similar to HIVs should be designated as immunodeficiency viruses of the appropriate host species. (For example, simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV) or African green monkey immunodeficiency virus (AGMIV)).

6. Because HIV isolates are numerous and display considerable genetic heterogeneity, particularly in the env gene, it will be necessary for each laboratory to assign subspecies designations to their isolates. (For example, the 42nd isolate at the University of Chicago could be described as HIV (CHI-42)).

7. Any future isolates of human retroviruses with a clear but limited relationship to isolates of HIV (for example, more than 20% but less than 50% nucleic acid sequence identity) should not be called HIV unless there are compelling biological and structural similarities with existing members of the group.

¹Weekly epidemiological record, 61 (30) : 229 (1986).

²Science, 232 : 697 (1986).