

## "Origin of AIDS" update

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In our March 19, 1992, issue (RS 626), Rolling Stone published an article by Tom Curtis entitled "The Origin of AIDS: A Startling New Theory Attempts to Answer the Question 'Was It an Act of God or an Act of Man?'" In a nutshell, the article raised the theoretical question of whether the AIDS virus or precursor virus might have been transmitted inadvertently from monkeys to humans during a mass-polio-vaccination campaign that was conducted in the Belgian Congo in 1957 through 1960 using a vaccine developed by Dr. Hilary Koprowski. The article did not state that this in fact occurred but only that the possibility that one of his vaccines might have been contaminated with such a virus was one of several disputed and unproven theories.

The editors of Rolling Stone wish to clarify that they never intended to suggest in the article that there is any scientific proof, nor do they know of any scientific proof, that Dr. Koprowski, an illustrious scientist, was in fact responsible for introducing AIDS to the human population or that he is the father of AIDS. Further, the editors emphasize that the article did not intend to suggest that Dr. Koprowski failed to follow accepted procedures; in contrast, it made clear that Dr. Koprowski conducted his work in a manner wholly consistent with the available medical information at the time. Dr. Koprowski's pioneering work in developing polio vaccines has helped spare suffering and death to hundreds of thousands of potential victims of paralytic poliomyelitis and is perhaps one of his greatest contributions in a lifetime of high and widely recognized achievements.

After publication of the article, the Wistar Institute, where the Congo vaccine was made, convened an independent committee of six eminent scientists expressly to examine the theory. After more than six months of consideration of the issue, the Wistar committee concluded that the theoretical possibility of an AIDS virus having been communicated by the Congo vaccine was "extremely low." The committee stated that a seaman in Manchester, England, who had no known contact with the Congo vaccine, died of AIDS in 1959, making him the first confirmed AIDS case. Citing this evidence, the Wistar committee added that "it can be stated with almost complete certainty that the large polio vaccine trial begun in 1957 in the Congo was not the origin of AIDS."

The article also raised concerns with the production of polio vaccine in primary monkey-kidney cultures which may be inadvertently contaminated with unknown simian viruses. In that regard, Dr. Koprowski forthrightly and repeatedly has urged since 1961 the use of well-characterized tissue-culture cell lines instead of primary monkey kidneys for production of human vaccines. The Wistar committee made the same recommendations. It is significant that the much more appropriate medium of human diploid cells strains for growing polio viruses was first developed under the direction of Dr. Koprowski. It is also an important historical fact that the effective use and greater safety of human cell strains for manufacturing polio vaccine were first demonstrated more than 30 years ago by Dr. Koprowski.

Today, all polio vaccines are carefully tested, and there is absolutely no evidence that any vaccines contain the AIDS viruses.

Rolling Stone regrets any damage to Dr. Koprowski's reputation that may have been caused by the article and believes this clarification sets the record straight. Clarification