

HIV Vaccine Meeting
Bellagio, Italy
March 7 to 10th, 1994

Background

A number of individuals including researchers, industry representatives and policy makers have become concerned with the progress towards developing an HIV vaccine suitable for worldwide use. This concern has been heightened by the recent observation that despite having begun to establish cohorts for efficacy trials in a variety of countries, there may be no appropriate antigen to test.

The world relies primarily on the private sector for vaccine development. It appears, however, that despite the considerable worldwide progress that has been made on basic science pertaining to the HIV, the incentives for the private sector to enter the HIV vaccine field and to contribute to product development are slight. Although this is not new in the field of infectious and tropical diseases, it is of special concern considering the virulence of HIV and the historical effectiveness of viral vaccines. Furthermore, the approaches that have been taken are, for various reasons, highly technical and even if they are successful, will probably be quite expensive and difficult to administer. As you know, the Health Sciences Division of the Foundation is concerned primarily with the developing world where currently over 95% of the new HIV infections are occurring. Part of the division's general concern includes the potential mismatch of products designed for developed countries (high technology, expensive and potentially unstable) with those designed for use in less developed countries (simple technology, inexpensive, easy administration and stable). This issue was behind the genesis of the Children's Vaccine Initiative.

Two informal meetings have been held to determine how widespread is the concern about the vaccine effort and to explore potential solutions. The first meeting was held in London in August and involved scientists from seven countries. The consensus from that meeting was that there were probably many scientifically sound approaches to an AIDS vaccine that were not being pursued by vaccine manufacturers and that few antigens representing developing world strains were being incorporated into prototype vaccines. In addition, there are issues specific to vaccines for the developing world (where the HIV epidemic is the most severe) that are currently receiving little attention. Participants at the meeting felt that the current efforts require augmentation and perhaps modification to take into account the needs of the developing world. Although all of the issues related to enhancing vaccine development need to be further studied, the London meeting raised the suggestion that a new initiative may be required to better target and accelerate the process.

The second meeting was held with a group of scientists and manufacturers attending the National Cooperative Vaccine Development Group meeting in Alexandria, Virginia at the end of October 1993. While discussion at the three hour meeting was limited by the short time available, a consensus did emerge that more could be done to stimulate the development of a vaccine that would be appropriate for use in developing and developed countries. At the meeting some brief presentations were made of examples of situations where private non-profit and public stimulus have been used to encourage the development of products deemed unprofitable or risky for the private sector.

To this end, we are assembling a small group of individuals to begin the process of developing solutions to these problems. This group will consist almost equally of scientists familiar with the effort to develop AIDS vaccines and those familiar with other vaccine development efforts, public/private ventures and international institutions. This will be a working meeting. The purpose is **not** primarily scientific but rather to review the consensuses described above, further refine our understanding of the gaps and obstacles in the vaccine effort, and then begin the process of investigating how we might support and stimulate the vaccine development process.