Gallo’s Humor

The virus-hunter loses this round

March 1, 1997 By Walter Armstrong and Ronnilyn Pustil

World-class virologist Dr. Robert Gallo is leaving no stone unpushed in his Sisyphean effort to put the shine back on his tarnished rep. This twice-told tale turns on the question: Did Gallo steal credit for the discovery of the AIDS retrovirus from his rival, France’s Dr. Luc Montagnier? Many journalists close to the case think so. But NIH investigators pinned the rap on Gallo’s second-in-command, and the criminal inquiry recommended by Congress never happened. Robert Gallo professed his innocence in so many media appearances that by 1994 the NIH had ordered him to stop granting interviews.

Turn to the courts. In the epic sideshow’s latest development, the French Supreme Court of Appeals dismissed Gallo’s libel-and-slander lawsuit against the French newspaper *Le Monde*, which ran a 1991 series about the Gallo-Montagnier feud. Quoting from a report by a National Institute of Health committee, *Le Monde* alleged that Gallo had “contradicted the most elementary rules of scientific communication” and used Montagnier’s virus to develop and market the first HIV test kit. The court judged the paper’s research “serious and profound” and ordered Gallo to pay its legal fees.

Oh, did we forget to mention that Robert Gallo made two fo the most significant discoveries in recent AIDS research: Chemokines (natural HIV blockers) and herpes 6 (a possible HIV cofactor)? But that’s another story...

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