Robert Gallo, Codiscoverer of HIV, Takes His Research to Tampa

The University of South Florida welcomes Gallo as director of a new virology center that will focus on HIV, cancer, COVID and more.

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Robert Gallo, MD, the influential virologist who codiscovered HIV and developed a test for the virus, will be joining the University of South Florida (USF) faculty as director of a new virology center, according to a USF news release.

USF also announced that it will play host to the international headquarters of the Global Virus Network (GVN), a group of highly regarded virologists from more than 40 countries that Gallo cofounded in 2011.

Beginning in July, Gallo, 87, will serve on the faculty of the USF Health Morsani College of Medicine as the James P. Cullison Professor of Medicine in the Division of Infectious Diseases. He will also lead the new USF Health Virology Center.

Gallo was the most cited scientist in the world from 1980 to 1990. What's more, he ranked third in the world for scientific impact from 1983 to 2002 and has published more than 1,300 scientific papers.

Before his groundbreaking HIV research, Gallo received the prestigious Albert Lasker Award in 1982 for his discovery of the first human retrovirus, an RNA tumor virus associated with some human leukemias and lymphomas. Gallo has said that the early death of his sister from leukemia informed his initial career path. In 1986, Gallo received a second Lasker Award for his codiscovery of HIV-1 as the cause of AIDS and the HIV blood test.

In 1983, Gallo's HIV codiscoverer and research rival, French virologist Luc Montagnier, PhD, and Montagnier's colleague Françoise Barré-Sinoussi, PhD, received a Nobel Prize for the discovery of HIV; however, the Nobel Committee did not honor Gallo. Montagnier died at age 89 in 2022. Click here to read POZ's obituary for the French virologist.

Gallo told the Tampa Bay Times that he aims to research viruses involved in cancer, HIV, AIDS and more. He noted that his recently published papers “shed new light on the mechanisms of how HIV causes AIDS. That gives ideas for new forms of therapy that I believe have the potential of leading to a ‘functional cure.’”

He expanded on his research, telling the newspaper: “With my French collaborator…we found something very strange. In an infection, rather early, if not (immediately), there are abnormalities not just in the HIV-infected cells but throughout the body in all immune cells. How the hell does that happen? I was shocked when we had that data. So we decided to find out why, and I think we did.”

He elaborated: “It’s an overproduction of interferon-alpha, which is part of our innate immunity.... If it’s too high, and lasts too long, it becomes a real problem. We’re going to try to target that interferon-alpha with antibodies.... I want to bring it into clinical trials fast. If we can get a functional cure, you don’t need therapy anymore.

“I am very excited to join USF Health and TGH Cancer Institute and to work closely with Charly Lockwood, Eduardo Sotomayor, my associates at the GVN, the team at USF Health Virology Center and my dear friend Christian Brechot and the USF Microbiomes Institute,” Gallo said in the USF press release. “I look forward to when Christian and I can join forces as codirectors and bring together the USF Microbiomes Institute and the USF Health Virology Center, significantly contributing to USF’s commitment to becoming a leading interdisciplinary research facility."

“I am thrilled that Dr. Gallo, who is a true pioneer in medical research and a hero in American medicine, is joining USF Health," said Charles J. Lockwood, MD, executive vice president of USF Health and dean of the Morsani College of Medicine. “Together with Dr. Gallo and his virology team, USF Health, as the international headquarters of the Global Virus Network, will lead new research discoveries in the battle against infectious disease threats worldwide.”

To read more, click #Robert Gallo or #HIV Research. There, you’ll find headlines such as “Why Don’t Hepatitis B Vaccines Work as Well for People With HIV?,” “How Cancer Research Led to AIDS Breakthroughs” and “Treatment: Long-Lasting Meds.”

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