



THE ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY

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AIDS

JOSHUA LEDERBERG

April 4, 1988

PRESIDENT

Dr. Frank Young  
Commissioner of Food  
& Drug Administration  
Department of Health &  
Human Services  
Food & Drug Administration  
Rockville, Maryland 20857

Dear Frank:

Thank you for your letter of March 21st. I do realize the kind of heat that you had been under at FDA with everyone demanding that you deliver the impossible in connection with AIDS. The material you sent brought that home more vividly than ever.

I wish there were more that I, and the Rockefeller University, could do in responding to the concerns you expressed. You called the focus on one's own research "narcissistic"; it may be that, but I think that there are also significant structural elements in the way that careers are managed today under the grant system. Not many investigators can have the confidence and security of dropping their present line of work for one or two years with any assurance that they will be able to pick up where they left off, when they come back to their home institutions. I don't want to burden you with more paper, but if you do want to have ammunition on this point, do look at the enclosed talk that I gave to the NASULGC. Until that kind of security is possible -- and it is unlikely through the reform of the grant system so it will have to come from more robust shelters from institutions (and how well can we reassure our faculty?) -- we are going to be in continued trouble.

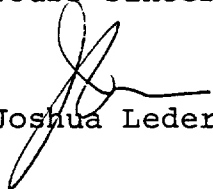
I'd be more than happy to continue the discussion that you bring up in the last paragraph of your letter, and in particular to invite you to come to the Rockefeller to talk to us about what it's like to be the commissioner of FDA, and to carry further what would be involved in the enrollment of university scientists into the PHS. Let me try to catch up with you in Washington during the next several weeks; or alternatively if you're going to be in New York please let me know.

Dr. Frank Young  
April 4, 1988  
Page -2-

On the scientific side, I think you and I probably are at one on the overhang at proviral state of HIV infection. The implications are 1) that we may substantially underestimate the number of infected individuals and 2) that radiation and nucleo-toxic chemicals may induce productive infections. I don't understand why Tony Fauci can be sure that the observations he cites have "no clinical significance."

I do realize that the only way to get an idea properly looked at is to do it yourself; but for obvious reasons I feel rather frustrated about any realistic opportunity to do that. I can understand that people like David Baltimore and Howard Temin, who are so visibly at the center of commentary on AIDS biology, take what may in fact be an extremely conservative position in speculating about the further evolution of the epidemic.

Yours sincerely,



Joshua Lederberg

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