22 July 1980

Dr. George F. Vande Woude
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Dear George:

Thanks for your amusing letter about the nomenclature problem. I agree that mal is more mellifluous than onc, but onc has the virtue of wide circulation over the past six years, and we have tried to maintain stability of nomenclature whenever acceptable conceptually. I don't find onc or c-onc so awful to say; moreover, I find that I use the generic terms much less frequently than the specific ones (such as src or c-src) in conversation. I am also slightly concerned about the use of "malignant" for a class of genes which should encompass any which are tumorigenic but not necessarily determining for malignancy. In fact, there are many people who feel that virus-induced neoplasia may manifest the cardinal features of malignancy under the influence of factors other than viral transforming genes; certainly it has not been shown that the malignant behavior of tumors is induced by the genes we are naming.

So, unless you feel very strongly about it, I would prefer to stick with onc.

With best regards,

Harold E. Varmus, M.D.
Professor,
Microbiology and Immunology

HEV:jm