

Harold Varmus nominated to head the NIH

President Clinton announced his intention on August 3 to nominate UCSF's Harold Varmus to the nation's most prominent position in biomedical science — director of the National Institutes of Health.

In a press release issued by the White House, President Clinton said, "As one of the world's leading medical researchers, Harold Varmus will bring great strength and leadership to the National Institutes of Health." Health & Human Services secretary Donna



Harold Varmus

Shalala said, "We are delighted that Dr. Varmus will be our new NIH director — the first to have won a Nobel prize ... He has been working at the cutting edge of modern cell and molecular biology, and has had an active relationship with the NIH for some 30 years, as NIH intramural scientist, grantee and public advisor."

In 1989, Varmus and fellow microbiologist J. Michael Bishop, head of the UCSF Hooper Foundation, won the Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine for their studies of genes that play a role in human cancer. They found that certain genes, called oncogenes, in normal cells can be "turned on" by chemicals, viruses and other substances to cause cancer.

Varmus, who has taught at UCSF since 1970, also spends much of his time exploring how the genes carried by the AIDS virus allow it to do its deadly work.

He is the American Cancer Society Professor in Molecular Virology and is the recipient of the 1982 Albert Lasker Prize, which he also shared with Bishop, the 1983 Armand Ham-

mer Prize for cancer research, the 1984 Alfred P. Sloan Prize of the General Motors Cancer Research Foundation and the 1982 California Scientists of the Year Award.

Upon receiving word of his nomination Varmus said, "I'm pleased and flattered to be the intended nominee for the director of the NIH. Assuming the confirmation process goes smoothly, I look forward to facing the many new challenges the job entails."

Chair of the Board of Biology for the National Research Council and an advisor to the congressional Caucus for Biomedical Research, Varmus has served on several review and advisory boards for government, biotechnology firms and pharmaceutical companies. Most recently he was a member of the Institute of Medicine committee that advised the Department of Defense on the use of \$210 million allocated by Congress last year for breast cancer research. In 1986, he chaired the subcommittee of the International Committee on the Taxonomy of Viruses that gave the AIDS virus the name HIV.
