Gates Foundation hires CDC AIDS boss…

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has recruited its second high-profile AIDS specialist in less than a year—pediatrics and preventive medicine specialist Helene Gayle. She has been lured away from her position as director of the National Center for HIV, Sexually Transmitted Disease and Tuberculosis at the Center for Disease Control and Prevention Prevention (CDC), and on 1 September she will join vaccinologist Margaret Liu, who is Senior Advisor in Vaccinology, at the Foundation (*Nature Med.* **6**, 1303, 2000). Unlike Liu, who works for Gates for 75% of the time, Gayle will be fully employed by the foundation.

Helene Gayle

Gayle's 17-year career at CDC began in the Epidemic Intelligence Service, and has spanned 10 different appointments. She counts among her successes at CDC the launch of a global AIDS program to develop prevention, care and infrastructure for HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases and tuberculosis in 14 countries in Africa and Asia.

She sees her move to the Gates Foundation as coming at the right time: "This is a unique opportunity at a unique moment in the history of the global epidemic, where an organization that has made such an extraordinary commitment to global health can really make a huge difference in the response to the global HIV epidemic." She adds, "I think I can further enhance the very strong foundation they already have in HIV." Gayle's role as Senior Advisor for HIV/AIDS will include "bringing more players to the table," and promoting the battle against HIV/AIDS in both the public and private sectors.

The Gates Foundation began giving grants for HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment programs in 1998 and has committed over $340 million to the disease. Individual amounts have ranged from $20,000 to a foundation in New York to $100 million over five years which was committed to the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative last January for development of a vaccine.

Myrna Watanabe, Connecticut

… and funds meningitis vaccine work

The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has pledged $70 million for a joint 10-year meningitis vaccine program in sub-Saharan Africa.

The Meningitis Vaccine Project (MVP) is a collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) and will be coordinated by the Seattle-based Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH). The goal of the project is to develop a serogroup-A meningococcal conjugate vaccine production and distribution program for African countries within five years.

It is also hoped that the program can attract partnerships with pharmaceutical companies. Existing vaccines are produced by Chiron, GlaxoSmithKline and Baxter. "The problem with currently used polysaccharide vaccines is that these are only effective for a short duration and are not suitable for children under two. Plus, there's a shortage of these vaccines and we are only blunting epidemics. We want to prevent the disease," says PATH spokesperson, Gina Rabinovich.

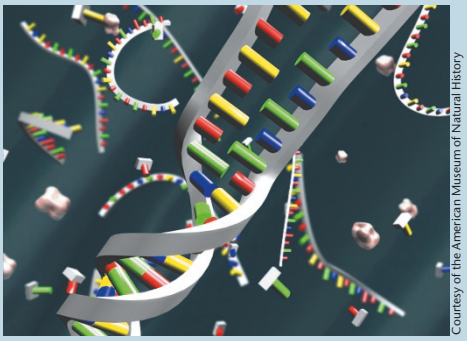
The conjugate vaccine to be developed by the Gates project acts by interrupting carriage in the nose. "Several pharmaceutical companies have come along way in discussing partnerships with us. There is definitely a huge market and now the companies have the financial incentive," says Rabinovich, but she declined to name the companies involved.

Between 1988 and 1997, 704,000 cases of meningitis and 100,000 deaths were reported in the 'African meningitis belt' from Ethiopia to The Gambia. Nine African countries have experienced outbreaks and epidemics so far this year, and 38,000 people are estimated to have died in the latest meningitis outbreak in Chad and Ethiopia.

James Berkley of the Countess of Chester Hospital in the United Kingdom says that even these staggering figures are underreported; due to poor laboratory facilities in Africa, clinical examinations are often inadequate to detect meningitis in children. Working for the Centre for Geographic Medicine Research in Kenya, Berkley analyzed 900 children between the ages of 1 month to 13 years by blood testing, but could not develop a fail-safe method of detecting the disease and estimates that one third of acute bacterial meningitis cases are likely to be missed (*Lancet* **357**, 1753; 2001).

Georgina Kenyon, London

Museum puts the *Gee!* in genome



Courtesy of the American Museum of Natural History

The mapping of the genome has shown us conclusively that we humans aren't that different from each other after all, at least genetically speaking. And although that's not the only message being conveyed at the American Museum of Natural History's exhibit, 'The Genomic Revolution', one can't help but swell with pride at the fact that even a knuckle-dragging *Homo sapiens* like myself shares 99.9% of his genes with the likes of Albert Einstein, Mahatma Gandhi and the entire Bush family.

The exhibit takes viewers through a basic lesson in genetics before evaluating the practical applications of such research from financial and ethical perspectives. What emerges out of all the light-up double helices and looping video clips is the idea that although the knowledge gained from sequencing the genome is remarkable, the task of effectively and responsibly using all this information looms dauntingly in the future. The long-term effects of many of the genetically altered plants and animals already introduced into the earth's ecosystem is still unknown—not that it ever stopped our species from pushing the research envelope before.

Stephen Horwitz, New York