

# CHRONICLE

**The discovery of a new human T-lymphotropic virus**, which might be the progenitor of HTLV-III, was reported by Max Essex of the Harvard School of Public Health at the recent American Society for Microbiology meetings. Designated HTLV-IV, the virus was isolated from healthy individuals in Senegal. It shares more antigens with a simian T-cell virus (STLV-IIIAGM) than with its human HTLV-III counterpart. Unlike the AIDS virus, however, it does not kill T cells. Conserved epitopes between these viruses are excellent vaccine candidates, and further study of HTLV-IV could assist in understanding how HTLV-III exerts its cytolytic effects.

**The race to market interferon for clinical use in Britain** has ended in a tie between The Wellcome Foundation (London) and Kirkby-Warwick. The Committee on Safety of Medicines granted them both licenses for their products, Wellferon and Intron A. The licenses cover the treatment

of hairy cell leukemia only, which accounts for about two percent of adult leukemias. Wellferon is a mixture of some 17 different alpha-interferons, purified from a lymphoblastic cell line originating in a patient with Burkitt's (African) lymphoma. Intron A is a single alpha-interferon, 2b, made using rDNA bacteria engineered by Kirkby-Warwick's parent company, Schering-Plough (Kenilworth, NJ). It is not yet clear whether Wellferon's closer resemblance to natural, mixed interferon will give it a broader spectrum of activity than a single variety. Hoffmann-La Roche (Nutley, NJ) has also applied for a U.K. product license for its Roferon. This is another specific alpha-interferon, 2a, manufactured through rDNA technology.

**New agreements** involving biotechnology companies include:

- Celltech (Slough, U.K.) was awarded a two-year, \$7.5 million contract by American Cyanamid (Wayne, NJ) for the production of genetically

engineered monoclonal antibodies to be used in cancer imaging and therapy. Separately, Hybritech (San Diego, CA) will pay Celltech more than \$1 million for one kilogram of monoclonal antibody for use in diagnostic kits.

- Bio-Response (Hayward, CA) entered into an agreement in principle to license a human cell line producing a single-chain tissue plasminogen activator.

- Intellicorp (Mountain View, CA) and Amoco Corp. (Chicago, IL) plan to establish a joint venture for the development and marketing of artificial intelligence-based software products for molecular biology. Amoco also paid some \$4 million for a controlling interest in Intelligenetics, Intellicorp's genetic engineering software subsidiary.

- Celanese Corp. (New York, NY) plans to acquire 4 percent of Nova Pharmaceutical Corp. (Baltimore, MD) for \$10 million, and the two firms will explore establishing a joint venture company to develop drug delivery systems.

