In the news

NOBEL PRIZE TO VIRUS DETECTIVES

This year's Nobel prize in Physiology or Medicine honours three European scientists who discovered the viruses behind AIDS and cervical cancer ([Press Release of the Nobel Assembly at Karolinska Institute](#), 6 October 2008). French virologists Françoise Barré-Sinoussi and Luc Montagnier share half of the prize for their discovery of HIV-1 while at the Pasteur Institute, Paris, France, in 1983, just 2 years after the first reported cases of AIDS. The other half of the prize was awarded to Harald zur Hausen, who is credited with linking human papilloma virus (HPV) to cervical cancer.

In recognition of the huge importance of these discoveries to public health, the Nobel Assembly stated that "[n]ever before has science and medicine been so quick to discover, identify the origin and provide treatment for a new disease entity". The discoveries have paved the way for tests to diagnose the diseases and for the development of antiviral drugs to combat HIV-1 infection. In addition, "the availability of a vaccine against HPV is now a reality thanks to the original discovery of the virus", said London-based researcher Adriano Boasso ([BBC News](#), 6 October 2008).

However, one American scientist was disappointed by the news. Robert Gallo, of the National Institutes of Health, USA, also claimed rights to the discovery of HIV-1, although his report was published a year after his French rivals. Gallo vied with the French team in a long-running dispute over credit for the discovery, and an agreement was finally brokered by the US and French heads of state in 1987. The Nobel committee has now made its position clear, saying "there was no doubt as to who made the fundamental discoveries" ([Reuters](#), 6 October 2008). When congratulating the prize winners, Gallo said he "was gratified to read Dr Montagnier's kind statement ... expressing that I was equally deserving" ([New York Times](#), 7 October 2008).

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