

June 1, 1973

Dr. E.C.C. Lin  
Department of Microbiology  
and Molecular Genetics  
Harvard Medical School  
25 Shattuck Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02215

Dear Dr. Lin,

I have spent considerable time in the past ten days contemplating the prospects for life and work here and in Boston. My conclusion, tainted with lingering doubts, is that I should withdraw my candidacy for a position in your department.

This decision is based not so much upon problems I foresee in Boston as upon my feeling largely content with what I have here. I was impressed with the breadth of your relatively small department, tempted by the new laboratories, flattered by your attentions, and drawn to the possibility of a more challenging student body. However, I was troubled to receive the impression that the HMS might be suspicious of the sort of large, collaborative efforts that seem to me necessary for first-rate work in the (too) sharply competitive field of tumor virology. I was also disturbed by the sense that my job security at Harvard would depend too heavily upon the impression others had of my independence from any senior coworkers. Since Mike has already decided to withdraw his candidacy, I have considered my attitudes toward the other possibilities: I would not want to work in this field without at least one other departmental member to help run the operation; if that person were senior to me, the independence issue might arise again; if he or she were not, it seems likely that anxieties about tenure might jeopardize our relationship.

To a certain extent, I suspect that much of what I have said may be rationalization, since it is not in character for me to be troubled by questions of security and success. However, I am disturbed by the fact that these questions were so often raised by me and by others in discussions about HMS.

But, as I said at the outset, my hesitancy about moving derives more directly from a growing sense that San Francisco is right now a very good place for me to be. In recent months, we have acquired additional space, begun the organization of strong sub-departments of genetics and viral oncology, instituted important changes in the teaching of medical

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microbiology, and outlined plans for a new graduate program in cell biology. I like the people I work with, the house I live in, and the mountains of California. I think our work has been productive; I feel I have acquired some identity in a crowded field, despite my many senior co-workers; and I am continually heartened by the collaborative efforts and monthly meetings of the California tumor virus collective (Vogt, Duesberg, et al). Given these things, it is particularly difficult for me to elect to leave them in face of my uncertainty about the alternative.

Despite these notes of contentment, however, I want you to know that I was considering very seriously the prospects Harvard offered. I am, needless to say, appreciative of the opportunity you gave me to observe them first-hand. It was particularly kind to make it possible for Connie to join me. Without a chance for her to evaluate the journalism market and to glimpse the current Bostonian ambiance, it would have been difficult for me to make this decision in good faith to her.

Yours truly,

Harold E. Varmus, M.D.  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Microbiology

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