

DONALD P. FRANCIS
PRESIDENT, CO-FOUNDER

Dr. Donald P. Francis, President and Co-founder of VaxGen, Inc., has been in the front lines of the battle against AIDS since 1981 and was one of the first scientists to suggest that the then-mysterious disease was caused by an infectious agent.

Throughout his professional life, his passion in fighting the spread of infectious diseases took him from India to Africa, and from Atlanta to San Francisco during a 21-year career with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control.

As a young CDC doctor working with the World Health Organization during the early 1970s, Dr. Francis played a key role in eradicating smallpox from regions of India, Bangladesh, Sudan and the former Yugoslavia, a population of more than 240 million.

In 1970, he battled the cholera epidemic in Nigeria and in 1976, he fought the Ebola virus in Sudan during what was the first outbreak of that deadly disease.

Dr. Francis' current efforts to develop a vaccine to prevent the spread of AIDS rests on the foundation laid in his earlier work in the successful development of a Hepatitis B vaccine, and his doctoral work on feline leukemia virus. (Much like HIV in humans, the feline leukemia virus develops slowly in feline hosts, which display no outward signs of infection as the virus destroys their immune systems.)

Dr. Francis was assigned by the CDC to conduct clinical trials testing the Hepatitis B vaccine in a volunteer group of gay males, the highest risk group for Hepatitis B. He was one of two principal investigators who conducted Phase III clinical trials for the Hepatitis B vaccine, which resulted in the first licensing of that vaccine in the early 1980's. As the AIDS epidemic surfaced, he was called to Atlanta to head activities of the CDC's AIDS Laboratory.

He was one of the first scientists to grasp the significance of the AIDS epidemic and to realize the impact it would have on the United States. Always outspoken, he has been an indefatigable advocate for a swift and logical public health response.

Dr. Francis was director of the CDC's AIDS lab during the scientific quest to find the organism that causes AIDS in the early 1980s. After the Institut Pasteur identified HIV, he worked closely with the French researchers to prove that HIV was indeed the agent that caused AIDS. He was one of the first doctors to sound an early warning that the nation's blood supply could be at risk from HIV.

Dr. Francis' efforts to call attention to the threat of AIDS and warn of the inadequacy of the public health response were chronicled in *And the Band Played On*, journalist Randy Shilts' seminal account of the early years of the AIDS epidemic.

From 1985 to 1992, Dr. Francis served as the Centers for Disease Control's AIDS Advisor to the State of California. From 1988 to 1992, he also served as Special Consultant on AIDS to then-San Francisco Mayor Art Agnos, and chair of the mayor's HIV Task Force.

He retired from the CDC in 1992 and began work with Genentech, Inc., of South San Francisco, in 1993. Genentech had made significant breakthroughs in research towards a vaccine against AIDS, including development of a vaccine shown to protect chimpanzees against HIV infection.

In 1995, Dr. Francis and fellow retrovirologist Dr. Robert Nowinski guided the spin-off of Genentech's HIV vaccine unit and founded VaxGen to continue the vital work as an independent company.

A third-generation California physician, Francis did his undergraduate studies at the University of California at Berkeley. He received his M.D. from Northwestern University and his Doctor of Science in Virology from Harvard. He did his internship and residency in pediatrics at the University of Southern California Medical Center in Los Angeles and his fellowship in infectious diseases at Harvard.

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