



March 27, 2019

Dear Friends,

Thirty-five years ago this summer, a few weeks after graduating from medical school, I walked through the front doors of the newly opened Whitehead Institute for Biomedical Research. Construction workers with punch lists congregated in the dusty lobby, which had not yet received its first cleaning. Donning a hard hat, I took the elevator to the fourth floor, which was uninhabited. I went looking for room 447, where I was to set up a lab as the first Whitehead Fellow. Fortunately, I was accompanied by my newly-hired technician, Laura Brown, who had graduated from college a few months earlier. (Today, Laura helps manage my lab.) Among our first tasks was to ensure that the toilets worked, arrange for a telephone to be installed on the floor, and unpack, wash, and autoclave glassware so that we could begin recombinant DNA work. Soon thereafter arrived a scouting party -- a senior technician and a postdoctoral fellow -- from the lab of Rudolf Jaenisch in Hamburg, Germany, and together the four of us began setting up the fourth floor.

At that time, I could not imagine that I would be writing to you now as the fourth, and longest-serving, Director and President of Whitehead Institute. I could not imagine that I would enjoy the privilege of building upon the legacy of my predecessors, mentors, and role models David Baltimore, Gerry Fink, and Susan Lindquist. And what a privilege it has been -- to help assemble and lead an incredibly passionate and accomplished group of Faculty and Fellows dedicated to expanding our understanding of living systems for the betterment of humanity; to shepherd an institution that embraces, without apology, the importance of individual and collective creativity in pursuing the most fundamental questions in the biological sciences; and to steward a leadership academy whose sustained success in training the next generation is manifest throughout the biological and biomedical enterprise in Kendall Square/MIT, about Boston, throughout our nation, and around the globe.

Today I write to you to announce that, having served as Whitehead Institute's Director and President since 2004, I will complete my current five-year term, which ends in the summer of 2020, and at that point turn over the leadership of the Institute to a successor to be selected by

the Whitehead Institute Board of Directors. You will be hearing shortly from Charley Ellis, Chair of the Board, regarding the search for my successor, and the formation of a search committee chaired by MIT President Emerita, Susan Hockfield.

What comes next for me? As many of you know, I have devoted my research career to understanding genetic differences among males and females, with a particular focus on the sex chromosomes, X and Y. My laboratory's fundamental studies of X and Y have historically found their clinical outlet and application in understanding human reproduction, and specifically the making of sex cells (eggs and sperm). But discoveries that my students have made in recent years have opened our eyes to an all-encompassing opportunity: to understand, fundamentally, the roles of differences among males and females in health and disease not just in the reproductive organs, but across the body, and ultimately to understand the profound sex biases observed in the incidence of everything from autism to multiple sclerosis, from heart disease to neurodegenerative disease. Going forward, I am committing myself to the deep and systematic exploration of these unknowns – and to building and nurturing a community of scholars here at Whitehead Institute, at MIT, in Boston, and beyond that will carry this work far into the future. This will of course provide a compelling context for me to continue mentoring and teaching MIT graduate and undergraduate students, Harvard-MIT medical students, and postdoctoral fellows, as I have done throughout my time as Whitehead Institute Director.

I look forward to welcoming my successor to this very special post. In the meantime, there is much work to be done. We must pursue our science boldly, mentor and empower new generations, and create the Whitehead Institute of the future. Thank you for traveling with me on the journey of a lifetime. I hope that you share my excitement about what lies ahead.

Warmly,

David