

**Opening Remarks by Francis S. Collins, M.D., Ph.D.
Director of the National Human Genome Research Institute
National Institutes of Health**

May 28, 2008

I am announcing today that I intend to step down as director of the National Human Genome Research Institute, effective August 1st.

I am not leaving to take any particular job.

I am leaving because the time seems right for me to explore a number of professional opportunities in public and private sectors that I could not really even consider – and certainly not discuss or pursue -- if I continued in my role as a federal employee. The rules would simply not permit it.

In addition, I have writing projects in mind that I would like to pursue, especially about the future of personalized medicine – again, activities that I could not pursue while serving as director of the National Human Genome Research Institute.

So I am going to take a kind of sabbatical for a few months – to write, to reflect, to spend some time trying to identify the next opportunity for service. I am not being coy with you – I do not have a definite plan of what that next step will be.

I am not leaving because of any problems or disagreements with NIH leadership. Certainly the budgetary constraints on NIH have been deeply troublesome for the last five years – and that’s something that I hope can be redressed in the future – but that is not the reason I am leaving. Despite these difficult constraints, NHGRI continues to conduct incredible research – perhaps just not as much as the opportunities would allow.

I was actually reluctant to accept the offer to come here in 1993. But as I reflect on the last 15 years, my time at NHGRI has been the most remarkable in my life. I have had the benefit of great scientific colleagues and profound scientific questions to which we are gathering answers at a phenomenal rate. We have seen astonishing discoveries, including the success of the Human Genome Project, which has laid the foundation for a fundamental shift in medical care that we are call personalized medicine.

I have had the opportunity to initiate and lead a host of bold follow-up projects that are rapidly moving genomics into the mainstream of medicine. The deluge of recent discoveries about genetic risk factors in common disease represents just one example.

I also had the remarkable opportunity to found an intramural program in genomics on the NIH campus, which successfully recruited an outstanding cadre of scientists and physicians, and has emerged as one of the strongest bench-to-bedside groups of researchers in genomics in the world.

I have had the privilege of working with the research community, the policy community, disease advocates, and leaders in the Congress and the Administration to proactively address the many of the important social, ethical and legal issues that arise out of genome research. Perhaps the most visible example of that is seeing the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act become law last week.

Deciding to leave now has been a terribly difficult decision because this is a very exciting time. Genomic science is revolutionizing medical research. And great progress is being made.

Fortunately for us all, the National Human Genome Research Institute will continue to remain at the forefront of that revolution. My leaving will not derail the progress in any way, as I leave behind a fabulous team of motivated, risk-taking, creative scientists to oversee the work in which we have invested so much.

There are so many colleagues here at NIH and elsewhere to thank for all the support over the years that I would certainly forget someone – and generally such a list could not be used in your stories anyway -- so I'll spare you.

But there is one person I would like to thank and that's Dr. Alan Guttmacher, long my friend and colleague, who will take over as acting director of the genome institute. Alan is a physician and a geneticist and has been the institute's most-able deputy director for the last six years. So, I will leave the institute in good hands until a permanent director is selected.