

### What is a Cause?

Burkitt's lymphoma is a cancer of children, primarily affecting the jaws. Described in 1958, it is the most common childhood tumour in tropical Africa. Work on Burkitt's lymphoma tissue led to the discovery and description of the Epstein-Barr virus in 1964, and it is now thought that this virus is the cause of Burkitt's lymphoma.

However, the process of attributing cause was not as simple as is commonly made out. For example, several other viruses were also detected in Burkitt's lymphoma tissue. Furthermore, the geographical distribution of the tumour (in a belt either side of the equator) led some investigators to posit a causal relationship between the tumour and holoendemic malaria. We now regard malaria as a cofactor in oncogenesis, rather than a cause.

Using the example of Burkitt's lymphoma, this presentation will explore both the meaning of the term 'cause' and its implications for current research.