The Facts About Animal Experimentation

FROM PHYSICIANS COMMITTEE FOR RESPONSIBLE MEDICINE

Each year in the United States an estimated 20-70 million animals—from cats, dogs and primates, to rabbits, rats and mice—suffer and die in the name of research. Many doctors are now critical of such experiments, calling them unnecessary, duplicative and extremely costly, and pointing out that better research methods exist.

Laws regulating conditions for laboratory animals are minimal and poorly enforced. The federal Animal Welfare Act does not cover animals during experiments, no matter how long the experiment may go on. Conditions for the animal subjects of medical experiments are often squalid and stressful; confinement, isolation, repeated handling, physical pain and injury are routine.

Non-animal research methods, including epidemiology, clinical research, and cellular methods, have proven to be more accurate, more applicable, and often less time-consuming and less costly. Unfortunately, vested financial interests and adherence to tradition are stumbling blocks on the road to change.

Biological and Medical Experiments

Many animal experiments produce results which are far from relevant to human health. For example, animal experimentation in the "war on cancer" has been largely a failure. Few useful cancer-fighting therapies have resulted, and cancer death rates continue to climb. Researchers at the National Cancer Institute are now changing to new techniques which allow human cancer cells to be studied directly, and eliminate old-fashioned mouse chemotherapy screening tests.

Animals and humans differ in medically important ways, and often animal experiments can produce misleading results. For example, repeated animal studies failed to demonstrate a correlation between cigarette smoking and lung cancer. As a result, public warnings about the dangers of cigarette use were delayed, despite a wealth of compelling human data.

Likewise, animal experiments in stroke research led to false conclusions, misleading researchers and wasting time and research funds. Of the 25 drugs which appeared to reduce the effects of stroke in rodents, not a single one worked in human patients. Animal tests are poor predictors of the effects of other drugs, as well. Of the 198 new drugs that went on the market in the decade ending 1985, 102 (51.5 percent) turned out to be more dangerous than pre-market animal tests and limited human trials predicted.

In addition, science's "publish or perish" environment and universities' hunger for large grant awards drive a system in which wasteful and redundant animal experiments are commonplace. Barbaric head trauma experiments at the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Cincinnati, in which hundreds of monkeys and cats received massive head injuries, were halted after physicians and scientists joined animal advocates in scientific and ethical opposition. A Cornell researcher was compelled to return funding for experiments which addicted cats to barbiturates and then forced them to undergo withdrawal. The research was condemned as irrelevant to human experience. A series of military-funded experiments in which hundreds of cats were shot in the head was halted following criticism from neurosurgeons and other trauma experts.

Consumer Product Testing

Animal tests for the safety of cosmetics, household products and chemicals are outdated, inaccurate and unnecessary. Antiquated tests, such as the Draize irritancy test (in which caustic substances are applied to the eyes and skin of live rabbits) and the Lethal Dose 50 test (in which substances are force-fed to animals in increasing amounts until half of the test population is poisoned to death) are less reliable and more costly than existing non-animal tests. Manufacturers most often conduct these tests simply to have data on hand for protection against product liability suits.

Education

Computer technology and highly sophisticated anatomical models have rendered the use of animals in education obsolete. In addition, educators across