
Academy Explores Use of Laboratory Animals

The National Research Council (NRC) has issued a report on the use of laboratory animals in research that is designed to serve as a "carefully reasoned statement" in the face of the rising tide of animal rights activism. Its conclusion is that "animal experiments are still critically important to further improvements in medicine and biomedical science." The report, which cost \$315,000, was initiated by the NRC in 1985. The research council is the operating arm of the National Academy of Sciences' complex.

The NRC's Committee on the Use of Laboratory Animals in Biomedical and Behavioral Research, chaired by Norman Hackerman of Rice University, acknowledged that animals pay a high price for human benefits, but concluded that "humans are morally obliged to each other to improve the human condition." It also affirmed that "scientists are ethically obliged to ensure the well-being of animals used in research and to minimize their pain and suffering."

In a brief discussion of animal activism, the committee observed that "the use of the term 'rights' in connection with animals departs from its customary usage or common meaning," in which rights refer to moral and legal relationships among humans. "Our society does, however, acknowledge that living things have inherent value." The comprehensive report adds that American society is influenced by the Judeo-Christian notion that humans have dominance over animals, but that concept "also insists that dominance be attended by responsibility."

The report describes benefits derived from animal research in polio, AIDS, organ transplantation, cardiovascular and kidney research, and research on behavior, pain, and memory. It also notes the benefits of animal research for animal health and wildlife management. Continued work on the development of alternatives to animal use is strongly encouraged, but the panel said alternatives will not eliminate the need for animals in the foreseeable future because certain studies simply require animal use.

With regard to other controversial issues, the committee found "no convincing evidence" of any widespread abuse or neglect of research animals. It also defended the use of pound animals (about 200,000 a year) in research. The committee did not address one of the main criticisms of the Animal Welfare Act—that it has not been interpreted

ed to apply to rats and mice. At a press conference, panel member and theologian James M. Wall, editor of *The Christian Century*, said they did not find enough "public sentiment" to warrant recommending such coverage.

The panel had hoped to be able to report on an updated survey of animal use by the Institute of Laboratory Animal Resources (ILAR), but this has been postponed by contractual difficulties, so the estimate of animals used in research, testing, and education, continues to be the 1983 ILAR estimate of 17 to 22 million.

The report recommends that no new laws or regulations be adopted until current ones have been "fully implemented and their impact has been assessed." It also calls for standardization of rules followed by federal agencies, more money for the Department of Agriculture's (USDA) laboratory inspection duties (an increase from \$6.2 million to a recommended \$10 million), and the appropriation of more money to enable researchers to comply with animal research guidelines.

One panel member, Christine Stevens of the Animal Welfare Institute of Washington, D.C., refused to sign the report. In an angry statement at the end of the report, Stevens wrote: "The report refuses to face the widespread, ingrained problem of unnecessary suffering" among laboratory animals and does not "make so much as a

passing reference to the serious problem of poor research using excessive numbers of animals." She also wrote: "I was shocked by the attitude of Committee members who asserted that we have no moral obligation to animals. . . ."

The report says all animals get adequate pain-relieving drugs in painful experiments, but Stevens says in 1987, more than 130,000 were exempted from this requirement. She also said the committee falsely claimed that all serious violations of animal care standards have been punished. (Study director John Burris says the committee took data from the last ILAR survey, covering 1968 to 1978, and that it felt pain control for animals was "adequate" given the needs of research.)

Also submitting a separate statement was Arthur C. Guyton of the University of Mississippi School of Medicine, who said the report "fails to make clear how seriously the Animal Rights Movement and increasing government regulation are impeding essential medical research."

He expressed particular concern over the future of large animal research, noting that one-fifth of the states have already forbidden the use of pound animals. These restrictions, combined with new regulations, mean that the cost of using a dog or cat approaches \$1000 a year, not counting the costs of research, he said. Other measures that Guyton said were costly and unnecessary include the imposition of "a very costly layer of veterinarian regulators," requirements for expensive operating suites for surgery on rabbits or larger animals, and "very arbitrary regulations for specific cage sizes."

■ CONSTANCE HOLDEN

Much Work but Slow Going on Alternatives to Draize Test

Since animal welfare activists started to call for an end to the Draize eye irritation test in the late 1970s, there has been a dramatic reduction in the use of the 44-year-old test that uses laboratory rabbits. Research is now being conducted on dozens of possible substitutes. But at a September meeting in Washington organized by the Soap and Detergent Association, speakers said that total elimination of the test will take a long time. And there is no evidence that any single non-whole animal test will ever be developed to substitute for the versatile Draize.

The use of the Draize test has been reduced by perhaps more than 50% in this decade as much of the testing has been

found to be redundant or, in the case of substances of known irritability, unnecessary. Tests have also been modified: some now use three instead of the six rabbits usually required. Since rabbit eyes are much more sensitive than human ones, Procter & Gamble has developed a "low volume" test which dilutes the materials to one-tenth the strength customarily used. Local anesthesia is also sometimes used.

"An alternative test cannot be required to be a valid predictor for all chemicals and products," noted Gary Flamm of the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The Draize test is used to establish safety and determine ocular toxicity for a tremendous variety of products including drugs, cosmet-