

Letters

Animals in the Lab

Issues related to the use of research animals, while not new, have become amplified in recent years. William J. Broad's News and Comment article "Legislating an end to animals in the lab" (9 May, p. 575) gives an example. It also illustrates a common misunderstanding. Broad refers to "animal-rights activists and pet lovers" as though they are one and the same, which is not the case. In fact, the true "animal-rights" activist is against the use of animals for any purpose. On the other hand there are many pet lovers who recognize that animals are useful to humans in many ways, and they are pleased to share in the fruits of biomedical research done with animals.

Nonetheless, Broad's article should be a reminder to all of us that there are those who would deny the use of animals for any purpose; and they are very active, not only in the United States, but throughout the world. Bills similar to H.R. 4805 are currently under consideration in various Western European countries. The antivivisectionists appear to be more active than ever and are campaigning with literature filled with inaccuracies.

The scientific community should attempt to disseminate correct information. There is a genuine need to better inform the general public, including pet lovers, congressmen, and other reasonable people, of the great strides that have been made in improving health and the quality of life for both humans and animals through the use of research animals. They should be informed that the vast majority of animals used in research and testing do not suffer pain, and that when painful experiments are performed they are normally done with appropriate analgesics or anesthetics. They should be told that there are searchers for alternatives for economic as well as humane reasons, but that it is unlikely alternatives will greatly reduce the number of animals needed in research and testing in the foreseeable future. It should be pointed out that at this time the only real alternative to animals in the laboratory is a loss in the rapid gains being made in improving health. The public should know that the biomedical re-

search community is concerned with those creatures entrusted to its care and is humanely treating animals used in the laboratory.

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Broad's article about the Research Modernization Act is titled in a misleading manner. The stated purpose of the bill is to establish a center to develop and coordinate methods of research and testing that do not involve the use of live animals, to develop training programs in the use of these methods, and to disseminate information on such methods. While the humane goal of the bill is to greatly reduce the number of animals in the laboratory through the development and refinement of techniques in which animals are not used, the bill does not call for an end to animal research.

The Center for Alternative Research established by the bill would not be a "clearinghouse," as described by Broad, but would be composed of representatives of each affected agency and would provide for cooperation and coordination among the many federal research and regulatory agencies engaged in research and testing, enabling them to share information and build upon each other's work. This coordination and cooperation are among the criteria established by a Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) steering committee that proposed program initiatives for health research planning (1). Because the center would be directed by representatives of the affected agencies, its actions would reflect the scientific priorities of these agencies. The National Toxicology Program functions in much the same way now. It should be noted that a recent statement of health research principles by HEW said: "To assure that HEW health research is responsive to public concerns, the public must participate in the setting of research policies and priorities" (emphasis theirs) (1, p. 191). The enormous constituent response to Congress when H.R. 4805 was introduced indicates the degree of public interest in this matter.

With regard to publication in the *Federal Register*, the bill provides that the

center shall publish in the *Register* such alternative methods "which meet the regulatory scientific needs of the agencies," which is not different from the present practice.

Because of the large numbers of scientists who have used animals in the laboratory for their entire professional lives, we realize that it is not simply "habit," the term used in the article, but professional orientation, which limits the resources now devoted to the exploration of alternative methods. With the encouragement of increased federal interest in this area of research, it is envisioned that more scientists will become attracted to the exploration and use of these techniques.

The article does not point out that the National Society for Medical Research (NSMR) has as its official purpose "protecting the rights of scientific investigators to utilize laboratory animals," and thus it is not entirely objective in its evaluation of this bill. Even with this bias, the NSMR's statement, as reported in the article, noted that "the expense, slow results, and poor reliability of animal tests is making alternatives more and more attractive. . . ."

The bill urges a direction to scientific research in which science has already begun to move, albeit slowly; it provides for a cooperative effort among federal research and regulatory agencies that is already embodied in HEW health research planning; it calls for implementation by the research agencies themselves through their representatives in the center; its severest critic agrees that there is value in the development of alternative methods. I feel the description of its effects upon scientific research as "catastrophic" is unfounded and not supported by the facts.

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References

1. *Health Research Activities of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; Current Efforts and Proposed Initiatives* (Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Washington, D.C., 1979), p. 84.

Required Technology Courses?

The resolution of complex technical questions is left by D. L. Bazelon (Editorial, 16 May, p. 661) in the hands of "elected representatives or public servants." The courts do not know enough to understand the issues on the frontiers of technology to render such decisions, he points out. One might add that neither