AHA Out Front in Fight to Save Animal Research Laboratories

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Effective prevention and treatment of disease depend on accurate knowledge about the causes of disease, on information about how disease affects the body, on drugs that combat disease, on devices that work, and on operations that cure. The knowledge, material, and skills on which prevention and treatment are based have come from a wide variety of sources, including basic scientific disciplines such as chemistry, biology, physics, engineering, and mathematics; observation of naturally occurring disease in human and animal populations; and experimentation on human subjects and animals.

As a result of research, prevention, and educational programs, advances have been made in the battle against cardiovascular diseases and stroke. However, these diseases remain the leading causes of death in the United States. The plummeting death rate from coronary heart disease and stroke is related to both lifestyle changes and the development of methods of treatment, many of which are based on animal experimentation.

We have no cure for most of these diseases, and the reduced mortality is presenting us with the enormous challenge of caring for an ever-increasing population of patients with severe cardiovascular disabilities. We are at the threshold of major discoveries that promise a cure but that cannot go on without animal research. Currently, there is no satisfactory way besides the animal model to reproduce the extraordinary complexity of the human cardiovascular system. Therefore, creation of new knowledge about the cause of cardiovascular disease, the testing of new drugs, and the refinement of new devices and operations affecting this area require animal experimentation.

The American Heart Association (AHA) takes the position that the responsible use of animals is essential and necessary to biomedical research and education in the prevention, reduction, and treatment of diseases of the heart and blood vessels.

As a founding member of the American Association for Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care (AAALAC), the AHA has been in the forefront of strongly endorsing responsible and humane use of animals in biomedical research. No AHA research funds are awarded for investigations or projects without proper documentation of compliance with appropriate animal care and use standards. These standards are regularly revised to reflect current understanding and practices.

Since the AHA’s Office of Public Affairs (OPA) was established to ensure that the interests of the AHA are known to Congress and the regulatory agencies, animals in research have been a number 1 priority issue. Through the OPA, the AHA advocates humane treatment and prudent use of laboratory animals and opposes legislation and regulations that would curtail cardiovascular research or make it unduly difficult or costly. The AHA also advocates increased federal funding for grants to upgrade research laboratory animal care facilities and programs.

The AHA is an active member of the National Association for Biomedical Research (NABR) and its public educational arm, the Foundation for Biomedical Research (FBR). The OPA participates in NABR’s Washington Animal Research Network coalition. The AHA works in active partnership with NABR and FBR in advocating animals in research.

In 1985, Congress passed the Animal Welfare Amendments that require the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) to change existing regulations and standards governing the humane handling, housing, care, treatment, and transportation of certain animals by dealers, research facilities, exhibitors, operators of auction sales, carriers, and intermediate handlers. To implement these amendments, the USDA issued newly updated proposed rules in a three-part proposal. Part 1 contains definitions and terms; part 2 includes regulations; and part 3 proposes standards for dogs, cats, nonhuman primates, hamsters, guinea pigs, and rabbits.

Working closely with the NABR during the 6-year public comment period, the AHA submitted four sets of comments to the USDA about the effects of these proposals on biomedical research. The AHA’s comments on part 3 were instrumental in convincing the USDA to change the proposed standards from rigid engineering standards to a mixture of minimum requirements and performance-based standards. The resulting rules, finalized in February 1991 and costing some $500 million, provide baseline standards with which all facilities must comply but recognize that professional judgment must be exercised in individual cases.

The USDA performance-based rules dealing with dogs and nonhuman primates (part 3) were struck down on February 25 by US District Judge Charles S. Richey. The USDA has been directed to promulgate new regulations, subject to public notice and comment, without unnecessary delay. This action results from a May 1991 lawsuit against the USDA, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Office of Management and Budget. The Animal Legal Defense Fund, the Society for Animal Protective Legislation, Inc, and
others sought to have sections of the new animal welfare standards declared unlawful; therefore, revised.

The implementation of Judge Richey's order is being opposed by the scientific community for both humane and economic reasons. To further revise the regulations without scientific evidence that changes will benefit laboratory animals is not only unlikely to help animals but would also waste scarce research funds.

The USDA has not yet decided whether to appeal the decision. The AHA has activated its 56 affiliates and its Grassroots Sciences Network in an effort to encourage the USDA and the HHS to appeal the decision. The AHA urged the network to write to the USDA and the HHS requesting them to maintain the current animal welfare standards and appeal the decision striking down rules dealing with dogs and nonhuman primates. AHA President Edward Cooper sent a letter to the USDA and HHS, urging them to appeal the decision.

Taking a proactive stance in this matter, NABR asked permission from the US District Court in the District of Columbia to intervene as a defendant to appeal this decision in case the federal government does not act. The court must decide whether NABR can become a party in this case. On April 27, Judge Richey denied NABR's motion for intervention. NABR has filed a notice of appeal.

The AHA will continue to work in active partnership with NABR in its efforts to pursue a favorable resolution of this important matter.

Announcement

Peter Debye 1994 Prize in the Field of Molecular Biology of Cardiovascular Diseases

The University of Limburg at Maastricht, The Netherlands, has been given the opportunity of awarding the Peter Debye Prize. This prize, in the amount of 20,000 guilders, is an award of appreciation. The funds for the Peter Debye Prize are provided by the Edmond Hustinx Foundation in Maastricht. This institution was founded by the Maastricht industrialist Mr E. Hustinx, who was greatly interested in promoting science and culture.

The prize is named for the physicist Peter L.W. Debye (1884 to 1966), a native of Maastricht, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for chemistry in 1936.

So far the prize has been presented seven times:
- 1977, Dr A. Querido, internal medicine
- 1980, Dr S. Moncada and Dr J.R. Vane, cardiovascular diseases and immunology (prostaglandins)
- 1982, Dr M.F. Greaves, immunology and oncology (tumor immunology)
- 1984, Dr M.A. Chamberlain, rehabilitation
- 1987, Dr T. Godfraind, cardiovascular diseases (pharmacology of receptor-response coupling)
- 1989, Dr M.J. Dauncey and Dr A.M. Prentice, nutrition/energy exchange
- 1992, Dr J. Hardy, aging of the brain (Alzheimer's disease)

The prize will be presented for the eighth time on the occasion of the anniversary of the university on January 14, 1994, to a person or group of persons (three as a maximum, but preferably less than three) who are considered to have made a fundamental contribution to research in the field of molecular biology of cardiovascular diseases—fundamental and clinical aspects.

A jury has been formed to select the recipient, consisting of Dr S. Moncada, Beckenham, UK, chairman; Dr K. van Dam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Dr H. Just, Freiburg, Germany; Dr M.J. Mulvany, Aarhus, Denmark; and Dr R.S. Reneman, Maastricht, The Netherlands.

The jury will consider persons or groups of persons from any country who deserve this award on the basis of their scientific work in the area indicated.

Nominations (in English) should include a curriculum vitae, a survey of the achievements of the candidate(s) (not exceeding four pages), and a list of publications. This material should be received by the secretary before October 15, 1993.

Further information about the prize can be obtained from the University of Limburg, Dr E.H.S. Drenthe, secretary of the jury for the Peter Debye Prize 1994, Office of the Rector, PO Box 616, 6200 MD Maastricht, The Netherlands.
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Circulation. 1993;88:829-830
doi: 10.1161/01.CIR.88.3.829

Circulation is published by the American Heart Association, 7272 Greenville Avenue, Dallas, TX 75231
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Print ISSN: 0009-7322. Online ISSN: 1524-4539

The online version of this article, along with updated information and services, is located on the World Wide Web at:
http://circ.ahajournals.org/content/88/3/829.citation

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