ANIMAL RESEARCH

Position Paper

of the

AMERICAN COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS

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INTRODUCTION

The use of animals in research and testing has been the subject of a long-standing debate between the scientific community and animal welfare groups. The scientific community argues that animal research is essential to research efforts beneficial to human health. Some animal welfare groups assert that the current reliance on the use of animals in research is not essential to future progress in medical science.

Scientists and animal welfare advocates share a belief that safeguards are necessary to ensure the humane treatment of animals used in scientific research and testing. Other issues identified as needing to be addressed include: development of alternative testing methods that do not use live animals; and mechanisms to ensure that where animal experimentation is necessary, treatment, care, and experimental methods limit animal pain and suffering.

POSITIONS

1. The American College of Physicians maintains that the use of animals in research is essential for the advancement of medical knowledge. The College notes that there are certain areas of research that require reliance on animal surrogates for human test subjects and that the state-of-the-art of biomedical research has not, at this time, progressed beyond this stage.

2. Investigators conducting research utilizing animals must perform these activities in facilities that meet appropriate standards to ensure the humane treatment, safety, and comfort of animals.

3. The College believes that a balanced approach will ensure the humane treatment of animals without unduly restricting the valid use of animals in controlled research settings.

RATIONALE

The use of animals in biomedical research remains controversial. However, there is general agreement within the research community that laboratory animals are extremely important in the search for new or improved means to treat, prevent, and cure human disease. Virtually every major advance in scientific and medical knowledge stems in whole or in part from research performed with animals. In addition, current methods of ascertaining the safety and efficacy of various therapeutic drugs and of testing for hazardous substances rely upon animal data.
The College notes that there are instances where the use of animals as scientific surrogates for humans will continue to be needed to benefit people (e.g., research into cardiovascular disease, cancer, genetic disorders, immunologic diseases, human reproduction, metabolic disorders), and the state-of-the-art of biomedical research has not progressed beyond this stage. There is insufficient evidence to demonstrate that alternative testing methods (e.g., tissue cultures, bacterial cultures, computer models) have been adequately developed for a number of areas of biomedical research and testing. For example, despite progress made in the use of in vitro tests at this time, they do not completely obviate the need for animal research in carcinogenicity testing. In spite of efforts to find a replacement for eye irritancy testing, animals continue to be needed. The College maintains that the use of animals in medical research and testing will continue to be essential for the advancement of medical knowledge in the future and should continue.

Standards of Care

The College believes that investigators conducting research should perform these activities in facilities that meet appropriate state, federal, or private standards to ensure the humane treatment, safety, and comfort of animals. The College believes that it is of the utmost importance that all research efforts adhere to standards that ensure the conduct of quality research and the maintenance of healthy animals. In addition, it should be noted that valid scientific data cannot be derived from unhealthy animals, and it is in the interest of the researcher to maintain the health of laboratory animals.

The College believes that a balanced approach to these issues requires that there be appropriate safeguards to ensure protection of animals and to not unduly inhibit animal research. Where animal experimentation and testing are necessary, humane care and treatment that limit pain and distress should be ensured. This may require the establishment of procedures not unlike human subjects protection review. Medical and scientific research continues to depend upon animal subjects; the majority of major scientific medical advances are testimony to the role of animals in research and testing. Given the present state-of-the-art of scientific processes, it appears that further advances in scientific and medical knowledge will continue to depend upon the use of and availability of animal testing models.

CONCLUSION

The American College of Physicians endorses the careful, appropriate use of animals in biomedical research and testing, since some areas of research must use animals as scientific surrogates for humans. The state-of-the-art has not yet advanced beyond this stage, and alternative testing methods have not been, and may never be, sufficiently developed for a number of critical areas of biomedical research and testing. The College recognizes the importance of standards that promote the conduct of quality research and ensure the humane care of healthy animals for research activities.