

The response reproduced below was submitted to the consultation held by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics on the ethics of research involving animals during October-December 2003. The views expressed are solely those of the respondent(s) and not those of the Council.

*This response was submitted using the online facility:*

Dr Nancy Harrison, US

## **QUESTIONS ANSWERED:**

### **1. Background: the use of animals in research**

#### **ANSWER:**

The increased longevity enjoyed in the modern world resulted primarily from improved sanitation and nutrition in the first of the 20th century, rather than from animal experiments conducted in the latter of the 20th century. The top killers of Americans-- namely heart disease, cancer and stroke-- are NOT decreasing in incidence. Improved survival of cancer patients is due to early detection, a technological advancement. Stage for stage, the war on cancer is a failure and animal experiments have not helped.

Animals can successfully model basic principles such as a closed circulatory system; at the cellular and molecular level, however, animal data does not RELIABLY transfer across species. Encouraging reports to the contrary are the result of selective attention; all the failed animal experiments do not get published in the scientific literature, much less reported in the popular press. Mice used for monoclonal antibody production are reasonably cared for. Other rodents such as rats in nociception work suffer abominably. Domestic pets such as dogs and cats, and primates, suffer psychologically regardless of physical care. I don't object to the shortness of their lives nearly so much as to the suffering caused by confinement, physical pain of experiments, and painful manner of death. I don't think animal experiments really work to help human beings.

### **2. Genetically modified animals**

#### **ANSWER:**

GM animals raise no new ethical issues in my opinion. They do, however, raise the real danger of viral transmission across species boundaries. Human stem cell research is much more likely to benefit mankind.

### **3. Alternatives**

#### **ANSWER:**

"Alternatives" would be more accurately termed "improvements." The most glaring abuse of animals occurs in product and drug testing, and monoclonal antibody production, which technically are not research at all. Actually, the alternatives/improvements already exist. Commercial enterprises will require governmental force to abandon their old-fashioned and scientifically invalid methods which, though without real merit, still provide defense from liability litigation. Both commercial product testing industry and the scientific industry currently operate in competition, such that animals are repeatedly used for the exact same study, in various labs around the world. Again, government regulation will be necessary to enforce sharing of animal data so less work is repeated. In our medical school, the physiology professors refer to the anesthetized dog as a 'preparation.' They cannot or will not recognize his or her sentience.

#### **4. Ethical issues**

**ANSWER:**

It seems obvious to me that all vertebrates suffer much as humans do. The non-vertebrates are a black box to us. Since we can't know what they experience, I would choose to err on the side of compassion. In my moral view, humans have a 'right' to eat animals, PROVIDING we use all the care and compassion in our power. Eating is a basic unavoidable necessity of life. All other uses of animals-- fur clothing, research, entertainment, are elective and therefore unjustifiable.

#### **5. The regulations**

**ANSWER:**

All provisions for animal welfare and their use are woefully inadequate. Furthermore, they are not reliably enforced.

#### **6: Providing information to the public**

**ANSWER:**

Modern science is arrogant in the extreme. The 'lab-jacketed welfare queens' are funded by public tax dollars but wax indignant and lock the laboratory doors at the slightest inquiry of the most egregious abuse. I would never trust any internal survey or oversight by an institution that stands to profit financially from animal research.