

Europeans *for* Medical Progress

Newsletter Winter 2004/05

Europeans for Medical Progress is a non-profit research and educational institute dedicated to improving human health by modernising biomedical research. We focus on rigorous scientific analysis of animal experimentation to assess the balance of help or harm to human health. We oppose animal modelled research as a method for seeking cures and treatments for human disease based on overwhelming scientific evidence that findings from animal models cannot be reliably extrapolated to humans. When such findings are extrapolated to humans, patients, consumers and research volunteers are harmed and medical progress is hampered. We communicate the urgent need to focus on methods of research that truly serve the interests of patients, rather than corporate finances.

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Spreading our message of education

The past few months have been extremely busy for us, with a host of opportunities for meeting people involved with or interested in medical research and healthcare policy.

Our reach and influence have grown considerably with the appointment of Dr Jarrod Bailey as our new Science Director. Dr Bailey is a geneticist with expertise in profiling gene expression in human tissue. He is based in the School of Population and Health Sciences at the University of Newcastle. His meta-analysis of animal and non-animal methods for identifying human teratogens (substances that induce birth defects) is due to be published in late January and ought to cause major reverberations and changes in research practices. A summary of his paper is reproduced below. We are delighted to welcome him into our organisation.

The Future of Teratology Research is In Vitro (Biogenic Amines - Stress and Neuroprotection, in press)

Birth defects induced by maternal exposure to exogenous agents during pregnancy are preventable, if the agents themselves can be identified and avoided. Billions of dollars and man-hours have been dedicated to animal-based discovery and characterisation methods over decades. We show here, via a comprehensive systematic review and analysis of this data, that these methods constitute questionable science and pose a hazard to humans. Mean positive and negative predictivities barely exceed 50%; discordance among the species used is substantial; reliable extrapolation

from animal data to humans is impossible, and virtually all known human teratogens have so far been identified in spite of, rather than because of, animal-based methods. Despite strict validation criteria that animal-based teratology studies would fail to meet, three in vitro alternatives have done so. The embryonic stem-cell test (EST) is the best of these. We argue that the poor performance of animal-based teratology alone warrants its cessation; it ought to be replaced by the easier, cheaper and more repeatable EST, and resources made available to improve this and other tests even further.



Dr Jarrod Bailey

In view of the progress we are making, we have changed our name to Europeans for Medical Progress. This name better reflects our diametric opposition to the Coalition for Medical Progress, a pharmaceutical industry lobby group devoted to promoting animal experimentation and attacking us and our position. **Please visit our new website at www.curedisease.net and please note our email address is now info@curedisease.net**

Doctors fear animal testing endangers patients

In August we commissioned a survey of 500 British GPs' attitudes towards animal testing and its consequences for human health. Pro-animal experimentation lobby groups such as the Coalition for Medical Progress claim that the medical profession is solidly in favour of animal experimentation, quoting a 1993 survey by the British Medical Association to support their case. That survey was sent to 800 GPs, of whom only 350 responded. CMP also frequently cites a 2001 survey of 1,000 members of the public, from which they can only derive support for their position by extreme massaging of the figures. The survey itself is currently the subject of an official complaint to the Market Research Society for breaching polling industry guidelines.

Our survey received 505 responses from GPs selected to ensure a representative geographic and demographic UK spread. Their answers reveal a staggering level of mistrust of animal experimentation amongst the medical profession and completely vindicate our well-founded suspicion that our concerns are very widely shared.

To the questions;

1) "Does it concern you that animal data can be misleading when applied to humans?" **82% answered yes, 8% no, 10% don't know**

2) "Today there are many sophisticated methods of testing drug safety, including pharmacogenetic studies using DNA chips, virtual human metabolic prediction programmes and micro-dosing studies where volunteers are monitored with PET and other scanners. Would you have more confidence in a battery of these human-based tests than in data from animal tests?" **51% answered yes, 21% no, 28% don't know, and**

3) "Would you support an independent scientific evaluation of the clinical relevance of animal experimentation?" **83% answered yes, 8% no and 10% don't know.**

Clearly, a silent majority of doctors today are aware that animal tests are not the safety net the public and the medical profession are frequently assured they are by the government and the pharmaceutical industry. As Norman Baker MP comments. "It is wrong to suggest, as the media does all too often, that the

scientific and medical community is all in favour of experiments on animals, and that they feel safe with extrapolating the results. They aren't, and they don't."

This extraordinary level of doubt about the safety of animal testing deserves to be taken very seriously. Indeed, we will ensure that it is both noted and acted upon. Mike Hancock MP has already launched an Early Day Motion (EDM) in parliament on our behalf, calling for the independent scientific evaluation mentioned in our survey. EDM 385 reads:

"That this House expresses its concerns regarding the safeguarding of public health through data obtained from laboratory animals, particularly in light of large numbers of serious and fatal adverse drug reactions that were not predicted by animal studies; is surprised that the Government has not commissioned or evaluated any formal research on the efficacy of animal experiments, and has no plans to do so; and, in common with 83 per cent of general practitioners in a recent survey, calls upon the Government to facilitate an independent and transparent scientific evaluation of the use of animals as surrogate humans in drug safety testing and medical research."

Action:

Please write to your MP (House of Commons, Westminster, London SW1A 0AA - you can find their name at www.locata.co.uk/commons or 0207 219 4272) and ask them to sign EDM 385, which will make an important contribution towards safeguarding human health and safety. Always check to see if your MP has already signed; at <http://edm.ais.co.uk/weblink/html/motion.html/ref=385> or telephone us if you do not have internet access. Please do not contact an MP if they have already signed the EDM.

We will be taking action to achieve an independent scientific evaluation of animal experimentation and will contact supporters with further information in due course.

Raising awareness among politicians

EMP's director, Kathy Archibald, participated in a fringe debate at the Liberal Democrat party conference in September. She and environment spokesperson Norman Baker MP opposed neurosurgeon Professor

Tipu Aziz and Dr Evan Harris MP, both of whom are very outspoken in favour of animal experimentation. The debate was chaired by Baroness Miller, the Lib Dem's environment spokesperson in the Lords. The audience was riveted and the lively exchange of questions could have gone on for hours!

In January, Dr Bailey will be addressing a meeting of the All Party Group for Animal Welfare in the House of Commons. Although our remit is human health and not animal welfare, our perspective is clearly pertinent to MPs with an interest in animal welfare.

In February, EMP will be addressing a meeting of the European Parliament in Brussels on the subject of the new chemical testing proposals known as REACH. Green MEP Dr Caroline Lucas has been instrumental in setting up this meeting. EMP scientific consultant Professor Claude Reiss will be presenting data to show that while animal tests are completely inadequate for identifying toxic chemicals, DNA chips provide rapid and reliable indications of risk. EMP is working closely on this issue with two other scientific organisations in Europe: Equivita (www.equivita.it) and Antidote-Europe (www.antidote-Europe.org).

EMP submitted written evidence to the Health Select Committee's current inquiry into the influence of the pharmaceutical industry. This inquiry is hugely significant and will undoubtedly precipitate changes in the current systems that are supposed to protect consumers' health and safety. Recent high-profile failures in those systems include the Seroxat scandal and the Vioxx tragedy, in which thousands of people (as many as 55,000 according to a senior FDA official) died from heart attacks or strokes caused by the painkiller. The Seroxat scandal concerns revelations that SSRI anti-depressants are ineffective in children and can cause suicidal thoughts and dependence, all of which was known for many years by the manufacturers but was deliberately suppressed, without intervention from the regulatory agencies. Vioxx is the biggest drug recall in history and the most obvious failure in drug regulation since thalidomide. There are many other recent examples of blockbuster drugs being withdrawn or considered for withdrawal because of serious or fatal side-effects which have emerged only after mass-marketing. Dr Richard Horton, editor of The Lancet, describes this as a public health emergency.

Many experts have given evidence to the Committee showing that company profits are frequently favoured over public health. This inquiry is very timely, and the oral evidence sessions available at

www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmhealth.htm make fascinating reading. If some good can be wrested from so much suffering, there must be major changes in drug development, testing, marketing and regulation, which must include replacing the hazardous practice of testing on animals.

Debates in the media

Kathy Archibald debated with Professor Tipu Aziz on the Today programme (Radio 4) and with Dr Ian Gibson MP on The Politics Show in the eastern region. She was also interviewed on Radio Europe, Radio Oxford, Radio Hereford and Radio Scotland. Dr Bailey recorded two interviews for Passion for the Planet Radio (www.passionfortheplanet.com), which will be broadcast in the new year. Many of these debates were precipitated by the controversial new animal lab which Oxford University is seeking to build. This will, no doubt, afford more opportunities for debate in future and although the media is spectacularly one-sided on this issue, it is gratifying that millions of people are hearing our perspective, even if only occasionally. We have, as ever, had many letters printed in national and local newspapers.

Raising awareness among medical professionals

EMP attended a conference in London, hosted by the British Medical Journal and entitled "Making Healthcare Safer" - precisely our remit - as well as the annual conference of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) in Birmingham. These were two of the most significant opportunities we have had for speaking to people who shape healthcare policy, implement it, or witness its effects. We were delighted by the level of interest in our organisation and by the overwhelming encouragement and support for what we are seeking to achieve.

We were very pleased to have a significant letter published in the Lancet (23rd October), which generated some new interest in and support for our organisation from GPs and others.

We were delighted to have been invited by Tony Benn to the Lord Mayor's lecture at St Thomas's Hospital, in order to raise the issue of the medical dangers of animal experimentation amongst the professionals working in association with the hospital.

Educational opportunities

Kathy Archibald spoke to packed 6th-form audiences at Westminster School and Haverhill School, as well as to the public in Norwich. Dr Bailey gave public talks in Manchester and in London, as part of the European Social Forum. Such talks are so rewarding because the audience has generally never been exposed to what we have to say and is surprised by the rigour and persuasiveness of our case. We guarantee to stimulate a lively discussion and, we hope, a critical re-appraisal of previously accepted dogmas.

We are thrilled to have had a lengthy opinion article printed in School Science Review, which is read by the great majority of secondary school science teachers. The opening and closing paragraphs follow:

"Animal experimentation raises passions like few other topics. There are striking parallels between those who defend it and those who defend creationism - the subject of the last issue's Opinion. Adherents to the orthodoxy that animal research plays a crucial role in saving human lives generally feel they do not have to explain themselves; the rightness of their position is beyond doubt and it is their opponents who should question the veracity of their information and thus the basis of their assumptions. To suggest that belief in the value of animal research may be based more on faith than reason is dismissed as heresy. But surely science teachers should encourage students to question accepted wisdoms even - or especially - when they are pillars of academic and scientific tradition. If such status is truly warranted they will withstand the scrutiny and students will learn more about critical thought and the scientific process.

I cannot do better than to conclude with the same appeal to rationality with which Bryan Chapman ended his Opinion on creationism. It is surely important that people are educated in a way that allows them to make up their own minds. Scientific beliefs must be based on evidence. Tradition, academic authority, even the weight of opinion of the entire scientific establishment cannot alter the truth of the evidence before them: the facts speak for themselves. If the consequences, both good and bad, of our use of animals in medical research over the past fifty years were placed in a giant balance before us, it would become very clear that we have been harmed far more than we have been helped. Many in the scientific establishment would hesitate to accept the verdict because their livelihoods and reputations are at

stake. But the educational establishment, being open minded and dedicated seekers of truth, would rush to re-write the textbooks and the curriculum to incorporate such an important revelation. Wouldn't they?"



Kathy Archibald

The column, as expected, provoked some angry responses from the likes of Dr Ted Griffiths of the Biomedical Research Education Trust. BRET is a pharmaceutical industry funded lobby for animal experimentation, which also receives government money to send promotional material and speakers into schools extolling the virtues of animal experimentation. They have for years been afforded countless opportunities to present their case throughout the educational establishment, virtually unopposed, but are crying foul because they were not "given at least equal space to put their case" in this particular opinion column.

We are pleased to have contributed an article to the excellent "Issues" series of books (www.independence.co.uk) for schools, in Issues number 90, entitled "Cloning". Like cloning, animal experimentation is a hot topic in schools and it is frustrating to have so few opportunities to raise our perspective on the issue because we are constrained by lack of funding. By contrast, groups such as BRET and pharmaceutical companies have enormous resources at their disposal as well as privileged access to the education system. However, every opportunity we do secure is valuable and certainly leaves a lasting impression, according to the schools where we have been invited to speak or debate.

We will be exhibiting and Dr Bailey will be speaking at the three day conference; "Science, Medicine and the Law" organised by the Green Network (www.environmentalhealthfocus.co.uk) in London January 31st - February 2nd. This will be a great opportunity to meet individuals and organisations with related concerns.

We will also be exhibiting again at the Feel Good Show (www.healthyinfo.co.uk) at the Business Design Centre, Islington, where Dr Bailey will be speaking at 3.30pm on April 30th.

We look forward to meeting some of you at either of these events - and to reaching new audiences with our vital message.