

SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

(In association with R.S.P.C.A. England) Patroness: LADY Y.P. McNEICE



13 November 2008

Straits Times
Forum

Dear Sir/Madam,

Animal testing: Have a care for lab animals

I REFER to last Saturday's science feature on animal experimentation, 'Lab-testing of animals on the rise here', which reported the ominous news that lab-testing of animals is on the rise in Singapore.

Although much of the article contained reassurances from various sources that Singapore research laboratories follow 'best practices', what are today's internationally recognised best practices is nowhere mentioned.

The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) is also concerned that there appears to be no independent assessment in determining whether or not existing standards are met, and if they are internationally accepted as best practices.

I refer to the remarks that criticisms by groups like Britain's Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) are unfounded in relation to National Advisory Committee for Laboratory Animal Research (Naclar) guidelines instituted in 2004.

For the record, when Naclar was set up in 2004, the standards in its guidelines for the husbandry and care of laboratory animals were found by the RSPCA to be inadequate.

The RSPCA told Naclar its cage sizes were extremely small and did not permit adequate exercise, normal social behaviour or appropriate environmental enrichment. Naclar standards for cage sizes at that time were based on United States Institute for Laboratory Animal Research standards.

As of June 2007, the European Commission (with expert input from RSPCA scientific staff) has adopted new guidelines for the housing and care of animals used in laboratories. The revised Appendix A may be found at www.coe.int/t/e/legal_affairs/legal_co-operation/biological_safety_use_of_animals/laboratory_animals/A_texts_docs.asp#TopOfPage.

In view of the report that Singapore research labs follow 'best practices', the SPCA sincerely hopes that Naclar has adopted or will adopt these guidelines, which will result in improved welfare for laboratory animals in Singapore.

The comments from Professor Bernard Tan will distress those in the animal welfare community: 'It could take anything from 50 years to never to eliminate animal research, because we do not know the complexity of organisms' cells and tissues. At the end of it all, we want to alleviate human suffering; so if you want to quarrel with that, quarrel with that.'

As cited in the report, the National University of Singapore has already developed two animal-free testing methods. The SPCA sincerely hopes Singapore will continually strive to seek alternative research methods which do not involve the use of animals.

As much as there was justification in the article that animals need to be tested on, and assurance that they receive 'top-quality' care in laboratories here, the immense suffering they endure in the name of science must never be trivialised. Animals in this situation have no choice and no voice.

Yours sincerely,

Deirdre Moss
Executive Officer