

Animal research and the pharmaceutical industry

We all benefit from treatments that have depended on animal research. All new prescription medicines are developed with the help of information from animal studies. This is so, regardless of the particular company developing the medicine or the country in which that company is based. It is with good reason that the pharmaceutical industry needs to conduct research in animals and that governments around the world demand data from this research before they will allow medicines to be tested and used in people.

Pharmaceutical companies work at the forefront of technology and scientists search for and use non-animal methods wherever possible. These methods play an important role in the research process but they only give some of the information that is needed. For the present, and the foreseeable future, animals remain an absolutely essential bridge between the computer and test tube work at the beginning of the research process and the testing in patients towards the end.

Some effects of medicines can only be evaluated in the living body because of the complex biological reactions that cause them to occur. It is recognised throughout the world that well designed and carefully interpreted animal studies enable researchers to get much closer to the human situation than is possible using non-animal methods alone.

As a result, pharmaceutical companies that bring a new treatment from an idea, to a real medicine that doctors can prescribe, are all in the same position. They must either do the animal work to assess the likely effects of potential new medicine in-house or they must contract outside organisations to do so on their behalf.

Every researcher, and the organisations for which they work, has a moral and legal obligation to use as few animals as possible and to ensure that welfare is always given the high priority it deserves. But most people would accept that it would be immoral to endanger human life in order to avoid using animals.

In spite of the fundamental need for animal research, companies developing new medicines, some employees and their families, investors and shareholders now face a systematic campaign of violence and intimidation by a small number of animal rights activists. The malicious actions of the more extreme activists are threatening the development of new medicines in this country. That is a direct attack, not just on the organisations and individuals concerned, but on patients, the future of medical research and the UK as a whole.

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