

Although 215 publications are cited in the report, surprisingly these did not include the comprehensive review papers by Close and others<sup>1,2</sup> based on the Report of the Working Party on euthanasia prepared for DGXI of the European Commission. This seems a strange oversight. There are differences between what is judged acceptable on the east and west sides of the Atlantic. For example, the AVMA panel concludes that neuromuscular blocking agents may be used for restraint if immediately prior to the use of some acceptable form of euthanasia and under other, albeit strictly limited, circumstances. Some discussion about the differences in the stances adopted by other groups (such as the above-mentioned European Group) and on the reasons for these would have strengthened the document. However, it is a valuable review, particularly as the recommendations are in line with relevant USA laws and guidelines, for use in the USA.

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**2000 Report of the AVMA Panel on Euthanasia** (March 2001). *Journal of the American Veterinary Medicine Society* 218: 669-696

<sup>1</sup> Close B, Banister K, Baumans V, Bernoth E-M, Bromage N, Bunyan J, Erhardt W, Flecknell P, Gregory N, Hackbarth H, Morton D and Warwick C 1996 Recommendations for euthanasia of experimental animals. Part 1. *Laboratory Animals* 30: 293-316

<sup>2</sup> Close B, Banister K, Baumans V, Bernoth E-M, Bromage N, Bunyan J, Erhardt W, Flecknell P, Gregory N, Hackbarth H, Morton D and Warwick C 1997 Recommendations for euthanasia of experimental animals. Part 2. *Laboratory Animals* 31: 1-32

### Consistency of judgements on animal research protocols

At most research institutions in the USA, studies involving animal use have to be approved by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC). A similar system is operated in many other countries including, for example, Australia and New Zealand. In the UK, although responsibility for approval of the use of animals in research resides with the Home Office, the role of the local ethical review process (ERP) corresponds quite closely to that of IACUCs. Several federal and professional guidelines require IACUCs to consider aspects such as the value of the proposed research at fundamental and applied levels, the quality of the research design, the justification for the type and number of animals to be used, and the degree of pain and stress to the animals involved. Cost-benefit assessment (weighing the adverse welfare impacts on the animals involved against the potential benefits of the research) undertaken in some collective way (eg by IACUC or ERP), rather than by one individual, is believed by many to be crucial for reaching ethically sound conclusions. There is perhaps a general assumption also that there is a 'right' answer to be found and that properly functioning ethical review committees (including IACUCs) will, at least for the most part, find this right answer. It would be comforting to know that such committees tend to reach the same conclusions about the same proposals — rejecting all those in which the costs appear disproportionate to the benefits and approving only those in which the benefits clearly outweigh the costs and in which the costs are limited. The results of a recent study do not provide this comfort.

Plous and Herzog (2001) asked 50 IACUCs to submit their three most recently reviewed research protocols in animal behaviour, and distributed each of these among the IACUCs for review a second time, so that each protocol was reviewed independently by two IACUCs. The IACUCs were asked to recommend one of four possible judgements: approve as written, approve with conditions, defer decision pending further information, or reject. They found that the judgements of the committees were not significantly correlated. Furthermore, it was found that, regardless of the degree of severity of the procedures involved in the protocols, inter-committee agreement did not exceed chance levels.

The authors acknowledged that the results might, in part, be related to the methodology of the study (the committees showed a bias toward harsher second opinions), but this effect did not fully account for the results. As the authors state, others have noted that “the regulatory structure of human and animal research depends upon the ability of IACUCs to make reliable judgements about which research to approve and which to disapprove”. Their results suggest that there may be low inter-committee agreement and they suggest that enhanced reviewer training and standardisation of the review process may be the way forward.

**Plous S and Herzog H** 2001 Reliability of protocol reviews for animal research. *Science* 293: 608-609

### **Report of the UK Animal Procedures Committee for 2000**

The function of the Animal Procedures Committee (APC) in the UK is to provide the Home Secretary — the government minister responsible — with independent advice about the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and his functions under it. The members are experts from a wide variety of backgrounds. The Committee can set its own agenda but must also deal with questions referred to it by the Home Secretary, and the law requires that, in its deliberations, it must take account both of the legitimate requirements of science and industry and of the protection of animals against avoidable suffering. The work of the APC and its sub-committees during the year 2000 is outlined in the Report published on 19 July 2001 (see details below).

The Research and Alternatives subcommittee advises the Home Office about the allocation of grants to sponsor scientific work on the three Rs (replacement, reduction and refinement) and to develop and promote awareness and use of alternatives to animal procedures. The projects currently being supported are listed. The budget made available (£265,500) was a modest increase on that of the previous year. The Committee “strongly believes that the Government should not only maintain, but also substantially increase its financial support for these initiatives”. The Education and Training sub-Committee’s work was largely concerned with training for Named Care and Welfare Officers (NACWOs). A draft syllabus for a proposed compulsory introductory course for NACWOs is given in one of the Appendices. In December 2000, the Cost Benefit Working Group issued a public consultation paper. One of the aims of this Working Group is to produce an authoritative statement on the validity of animal experiments and to explore how the present cost-benefit assessment process might be improved. The Group hopes to produce its report in 2001.

Among the other issues considered by the APC during 2000 were ‘openness’ in the conduct and administration of research using animals (the balance of the advantages for better public understanding against constraints of personal security and commercial confidentiality), the use of primates in research, and solutions to the problem of over-production of animals for use in research.

**Report of the Animal Procedures Committee for 2000** (July 2001). Published by The Stationery Office Ltd, London, UK. 41 pp. A4 paperback. Available from The Publications Centre, PO Box 29, Norwich NR3 1GN, UK. E-mail: [book.orders@theso.co.uk](mailto:book.orders@theso.co.uk). Price £8.70.

### **The state of animal protection in North America and worldwide 2001**

‘*The State of the Animals 2001*’ (see details below) examines the way in which the welfare of animals has changed during the last 50 years. The editors, Deborah Salem, Director of the Humane Society Press, and Andrew Rowan, Senior Vice President for Research, Education and International Issues at the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), have gathered together a collection of 13 essays that provide a mine of information on animal welfare issues. Chapter