Animal ethics in basic scientific research

One of the cornerstones for the development of medical science has been and will continue to be, basic experimental research, very often involving the use of animals. This is also the case for spine research, both for assessment of new therapeutic devices and for basic research regarding pathophysiologic mechanisms of spine pathology. However, a relatively new phenomenon is evolving that has previously mainly been the private concern of the scientist, namely animal ethics. There is an increasing awareness in the society, particularly amongst younger people, that the right of the animals must be protected and that experiments for the good of mankind must be conducted only if well-motivated aims and a proper handling of the animals can be assured. Historically, scientists have been considered capable of evaluating these issues by themselves, but there is now an increasing demand that stricter regulations should be enforced. In a way one might consider this as a major limitation for the scientists conducting animal experiments, regardless of all the additional bureaucratic proce-

dures, but time and people change. Usually, there are no ethical laws being violated in the laboratories over the world, but there have been some examples where the scientists, in their search for new knowledge, may have forgotten to preserve the respect and dignity of the animals involved. I feel that this new awareness is not a trend that will quickly pass, but something that the scientific community must accept and handle. For the medical research this will not induce any major changes since the regulations in most countries today are relatively strict. However, for the cosmetics industry this will result in a major reorganization. I think it is necessary that medical science make significant efforts to solve the ethics involved with animal handling and use for experimental studies. Hopefully, the end results will be a more careful planning and evaluation of the relevance of the experiments performed. Due to existing regulations, my experience is that the 'worst experiments' already have been made impossible to conduct. I also feel that the opinion by 'animal rights people' and scientists are

not that different. Both groups seem to agree that with a well defined aim and with a careful evaluation of the situation of the animal, balanced to the possible gained knowledge of the study, animal experiments for medical research may be conducted. However, there may be a wide gap between what can be considered a relevant balance in this regard between the groups, but still 'animal rights people' are seldom against every form of animal use just as scientists never are in favor of any kind of animal use. I hope that the future will result in an increased awareness in the society, both about the relevance of experimental medical research and that the use of animals is ethically well regulated, as well as I hope that the medical scientific community will further appreciate the public demand of animal ethics being considered in the experimental use of animals, in order to reach a mutual understanding about the progress of medical science.

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