

Statement von Dr. Andrew Knight zu Tierversuchen und der österreichischen Regierungsvorlage zum Tierversuchsgesetz

Few ethical issues create as much controversy as invasive experiments on animals. Some scientists claim they are essential for combating major human diseases, or detecting human toxins. Others claim the contrary, backed by thousands of patients harmed by pharmaceuticals developed using animal tests. Some claim all experiments are conducted humanely, to high scientific standards. Yet, a wealth of studies have recently revealed that laboratory animals suffer significant stress, which may distort experimental results.

Where, then, does the truth lie? How useful are such experiments in advancing human healthcare? How much do animals suffer as a result?

The fundamental principle underpinning the assessment of proposed animal research protocols by ethics committees is that the likely benefits of such research must outweigh its expected harms.

Directive 2010/63/EU on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes, which is being transposed into national legislation within Austria and all EU member states, asserts that it is *“essential, both on moral and scientific grounds, to ensure that each use of an animal is carefully evaluated as to the scientific or educational validity, usefulness and relevance of the expected result of that use. The likely harm to the animal should be balanced against the expected benefits of the project”*.

However, contemporary widespread reliance on animal models in biomedical research and toxicity testing is heavily dependent on assumptions of human utility – and, in particular, of reasonable predictivity for human outcomes. Surprisingly, these assumptions have rarely been verified or, indeed, subjected to rigorous scrutiny of any kind.

In my recent book, *The Costs and Benefits of Animal Experiments*, I have analysed large numbers of animal experiments selected randomly — the ‘gold standard’ when assessing biomedical research, and reviewed over 500 scientific publications. My presentation will summarise these results.

When considering costs and benefits overall, one cannot reasonably conclude that the benefits accruing to human patients or consumers, or to those motivated by scientific curiosity or profit, exceed the costs incurred by animals subjected to scientific procedures. On the contrary, the evidence indicates that actual human benefit is rarely – if ever – sufficient to justify such costs.

The Austrian legislation falls short of the standard required to correct these deficits. Contrary to internationally-accepted best practice standards, animal experiments will be approved by only a single person, rather than a committee.

Although the overwhelming majority of this research is publicly-funded, vital details of this research will remain hidden from public scrutiny and accountability. The published online summaries of experiments will have little information about the actual procedures to which the animals will be subjected, and the likely level of suffering they will endure. Experiments causing severe prolonged suffering will be permitted.

Such measures fall far short of the scientifically and morally required standard. Austria can, and should, do much better.

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