

October 20, 2004

Thomas Noe, Chairman  
Ohio Board of Regents  
30 East Broad Street, 36th floor  
Columbus, OH 43215-3414

Dear Chairman Noe:

I am writing today to ask you and your fellow board members to investigate a particularly egregious use of hundreds of animals in Ohio State University's Spinal Cord Injury Techniques Course.

During each three-week course, a total of 269 animals (189 rats and 60 mice) are subjected to multiple major survival surgeries and serious injuries, as instructors attempt to teach students how to produce a "spinal cord injury model." The spinal cords of the rats are exposed and injured by blunt trauma or transections of varying degrees. In some cases, the injured animals are then forced to perform behavioral exercises that are clearly distressing, including forced swimming, treadmill running, sensory and reflex testing, and other exercises for 45 minutes at a time. Post-surgery, the animals are likely to be in extreme pain. The mechanisms of pain in rats are, for all intents and purposes, the same as in humans and other mammals, and tissue damage of this sort may result in hyperalgesia, that is, a heightened sensitivity to pain. Since recent research indicates that even routine laboratory procedures, such as subcutaneous injection, oral gavage, and investigator handling, result in demonstrable and persistent stress, the animals involved in these highly invasive studies are certain to experience ongoing pain and distress. But according to the protocol description, animals could go up to 11 hours without being assessed for pain. Even in the best circumstances, pain may not be apparent to an observer.

The use of different sexes, types, and genetic strains of animals accounts for a portion of the inflated number of animals used. However, their use is not justified in this course. The response differences between genetic strains, sexes, or types of rats could perhaps be illustrated by a video of one of the investigators' research projects, or simply by stating what has already been reported in the literature.

Ordinarily, technicians learn research techniques in the course of their work on research projects, under close supervision of advisors. This course will involve the gratuitous deaths of 269 animals with no meaningful research outcome. Furthermore, there are a number of alternatives my colleagues and I have identified that render this course unnecessary.

My colleagues and I have requested a meeting with President Holbrook to discuss the course and the alternatives. Please convey to her your support for the elimination of these cruel exercises. Thank you for your attention, and I look forward to your response. I can be reached at 202-686-2210, ext. 303, to discuss this issue further.

Sincerely,



Neal D. Barnard, MD  
President