

FENS-SfN JOINT STATEMENT ON THE IMPORTANCE OF NON-HUMAN PRIMATES IN BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH

Our stance

The Federation of European Neuroscience Societies (FENS) and the Society for Neuroscience (SfN) strongly advocate the responsible use of animals in biomedical research. Animal models including (but not limited to) rodents, insects, fish and non-human primates (monkeys) are vital and irreplaceable for advancing scientific progress. This work is essential to combating the devastation of human neurological and psychiatric diseases, which affect more than 1 billion people worldwide, and for improving veterinary health.

Harassment and misrepresentation must stop

We deplore the tactics of extremist organizations, as deployed most recently against Nikos Logothetis, a member of both societies and a director of the Max Planck Institute for Biological Cybernetics in Tübingen, Germany. In 2013, an animal care-giver working at the institute for six months secretly filmed monkeys there. A ten-minute clip was aired on German TV purporting to show abuse of the animals. We deplore any such tactics that misrepresent the methods and benefits of animal research. An independent investigation commissioned by the Max Planck Society concluded that there were no systematic problems with animal care in the institute.

Fact-based approach is needed

Research using animal models has been, and continues to be, the basis for medical advances that have extended our life expectancy and raised our chances of overcoming or ameliorating life-threatening and debilitating

diseases. Such research has already helped in illnesses like cancer, heart-disease, infections (such as the flu, HIV, and most recently Ebola), as well as neurological and psychiatric diseases such as Parkinson's, stroke, deafness, paraplegia and drug addiction.

Research with non-human primates, because of their physiological similarity to humans, is a cornerstone of such basic research. We congratulate the recent recipients of the prestigious Lasker Prize for Clinical Research, Drs. Mahlon R. DeLong and Alim Louis Benabid who made critical contributions to the development of the deep-brain stimulation technique for Parkinson's disease. This medical advance has helped thousands of Parkinson's patients and would not have been developed had it not been for research on the physiology of the basal ganglia in non-human primates. Similarly Nikos Logothetis' research with non-human primates has made seminal contributions to our understanding of the higher brain functions affected in many neurological and psychiatric diseases, and has advanced our understanding of the non-invasive brain scanning approaches that are used world-wide for diagnosing neurological diseases in human patients and to study human brain functions.

Animal research must be carried out responsibly

Animal-based research must be conducted appropriately and within humane guidelines, maximizing scientific gain with the least amount

of animal suffering. It must be carried out responsibly and scientists must aim for the highest scientific quality, accompanied by the highest standards of care and without unnecessary suffering. As we pursue scientific advances, we strive to replace and reduce the number of animals wherever scientifically justifiable, and continuously refine experimental procedures to improve animal welfare.

Animal research is strictly regulated

While all of us enjoy the benefits of modern medicine, extremist organizations opposing all animal research ignore the fact that modern, knowledge-based and democratic societies have developed stringent and far-reaching animal protection laws and regulations. These protections represent a democratic consensus on how to ensure the best animal welfare and still enable critical biomedical progress. This includes the requirement that any particular experiment involving animals cannot be replaced by alternative approaches as well as regular oversight when the research is carried out and of the animal facilities. In addition, research funding agencies and professional societies have developed highly selective procedures to fund only the best and most promising research.

An informed public discourse is essential

Democratic forms of discourse have led to national and international laws and regulations that guide research, and should continue to be the basis for their further development. While we support freedom of speech and peaceful airing of diverse views, it is unacceptable that - in the pursuit of better health, understanding of disease and scientific progress - researchers, their families, associated businesses and communities face harassment, violence, and intimidation by animal rights extremists. As part of our dedication to democratic discussion and dialogue, our scientific communities are committed to expanding public awareness and information about the methods and historic impact of responsible animal research as well as

its continued essential role in scientific and medical progress. We encourage the public, the media and politicians to look beyond the sensationalist tactics of extremist organization and instead develop an informed opinion on how best to advance both, animal welfare and biomedical progress.