
Medical research is carried out to help promote and improve health and to prevent and treat disease. Research involving animals has been fundamental to understanding how the body functions in health and disease and to the development of modern medicines and surgical procedures. The Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC) and its members would like to see future advances made without research involving animals, but currently work with animals continues to be essential in some aspects of medical research. The AMRC therefore supports such work where no alternative exists and where it is carried out according to best practice as laid down in legislation.

The AMRC has over 100 members with a combined annual expenditure on UK medical research exceeding £600 million. Undertaken in hospitals, universities and institutes, this work involves investigation of health problems across the spectrum, from childhood illnesses to Alzheimer's disease, cancer to heart disease, neurological and mental illness, infections which pose serious risks, especially in poorer countries, and accidental injury.

Most medical research involves techniques such as test-tube and cell culture work, computer simulations, clinical trials, human tissue analyses and epidemiological surveys, but some major advances rely on animal-based studies. In parallel, new medicines are required by law to use animals during development and safety-testing. Patients are reassured to know that safety studies are carried out, and the UK public believes overwhelmingly that it is acceptable to use animals in medical research as long as suffering is minimised and there is no alternative (CMP/MORI 2005: <http://www.medicalprogress.org/reference/mori.cfm>).

It is essential to monitor closely the scientific validity of all research methods, particularly where they raise complex ethical concerns, as is the case with the use of animals. It is both law and good practice that animal welfare is ensured and alternatives used wherever possible. As an assurance of maintaining best practice in this and other areas, all AMRC members use rigorous expert peer review before awarding research grants, and all research involving animals must be relevant, carefully thought-out and approved by an ethical review panel.

Well-designed research yields clear data using the minimum number of animals and with the least possible suffering. The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and guidance from the Home Office safeguard the welfare of animals used in research while allowing important work to continue. These are widely considered to be the best regulations for such work anywhere in the world. Humane science is better science and the AMRC works closely with the National Centre for the Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs; <http://www.nc3rs.org.uk/>). These principles are enshrined in the work funded by member charities, and openness encouraged by project licence holders providing clearly written non-specialist abstracts of research involving animals for the Home Office website.

The AMRC is committed to responsible dialogue with relevant parties involved in the debate about the use of animals in medical research. This statement is reviewed regularly and revised and updated when necessary.

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