

# RESEARCH COMPLIANCE

News and Analysis for Colleges, Universities and Teaching Hospitals

## Animal Researchers Issue Call for Help, Say Protecting Work Is Everyone's Duty

Sooner or later, opponents of animal research "will come for" every researcher who works with animals, no matter how noncontroversial the work, or how well cared for the animals. As such, it is the duty of all scientists and their institutions to support animal investigators regardless of whether they are personally affected by threats against biomedical researchers.

That was the strong sentiment expressed by J. David Jentsch, a professor of psychology and psychiatry at the University of California-Los Angeles who uses monkeys to study "genetic and neurochemical mechanisms that influence cognition, impulse control, and decision-making."

"Our colleagues are under attack and they deserve our support. When the research is threatened or criticized, we have to work together as a community of scientists and academics to oppose those threats," he said.

Jentsch has long been a target of violent attacks by animal extremists; in a recent incident, the Animal Liberation Front said it had sent AIDS-tainted razor blades to Jentsch, who was described in a *Los Angeles Times* article as living with round-the-clock security.

He made his remarks as part of the closing panel at the recent three-day conference, "Animal Welfare and Scientific Research: 1985 to 2010." It was held, in Bethesda, Md., to "discuss the history, current practices, and future of research animal care." It was sponsored by the Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare, part of the National Institutes of Health, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, as well as by private organizations.

Speakers "explained how advances in animal care have resulted in increasingly sophisticated animal models and how these models have increased the basic understanding of numerous biological processes and diseases. Some of these include immunology and transplant medicine, cognition, aging, cancer, schizophrenia, depression, autism, mechanisms of brain function, social cognition, memory, and countermeasures against bioterrorism," according to a summary included in the December issue of *Extramural Nexus*, NIH's newsletter.

Jentsch was joined by fellow UCLA researcher Dario Ringach, a professor of neurobiology and psychology who gave up working with primates in 2006 after years of being targeted, with threats against his children being the last straw. Ringach is still active in combating animal rights extremists and others who oppose research involving animals.

Jentsch began by discussing two "facts." "Biomedical research involving animals is arguably the most benevolent and noble form of animal use in our society because of the broad benefits for humans and animals that result," he said.

"Our ethical principles, which make up the core of the Animal Welfare Act and associated agency-level regulations, have advanced, improving laboratory animal welfare and care," Jentsch added. But the problem is another "fact": the American public is ambivalent about the work.

Jentsch cited a poll showing a large gap between the percentage of scientists and the public who "favor the use of animals in research" — 93% vs. 52% — and another that found 59% of respondents said it was "morally acceptable" to conduct such research.

But, he said, "there is a mixture of opinion in terms of the broader public about their personal feelings, their personal, emotional state with regard to animals involved in biomedical research."

### Public Feels 'Moral Ambivalence'

"Many people would characterize this as opposition," Jentsch said, but he views it more as "moral ambivalence."

"This moral ambivalence," he said, "almost always correlates densely" with campaigns that are "strong, concerted, well-funded, and frankly, in many cases, antiscientific" and have drowned out the voices of scientists. For example, similar beliefs surround abortion, stem cells in research, and the effect of humans on global warming.

A problem has been that scientists aren't as organized or as vocal in counteracting these campaigns, partly because they are simply too busy, Jentsch said. But "so are most people, so that's probably not a very good reason" for failing to speak up, he added.

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A bigger factor is “we’re not necessarily used to discussing the nuances of science with nonscientists,” he said. But an important reason most scientists are silent is “we don’t really believe there is a problem or certainly if there is one, that it applies to us.”

“We don’t see this moral ambivalence in our day-to-day lives, we don’t see how it relates to the potential future of biomedical research and maybe it only applies to the West Coast, and we are only worried about what is going on in our own neighborhood,” Jentsch said.

Fear is perhaps the biggest issue, he said.

“Scientists are afraid to communicate what they are doing. They are afraid to do this openly because the ‘anti’ voices are so strong, and unfortunately in this case, they can carry sticks,” Jentsch said, referring to violent attacks and other forms of harassment to which he and his colleagues have been subjected.

The threats come in many different forms. Institutional attacks include “challenges to academic freedom,” as well as vandalism of facilities and “financial coercion,” which he said happened at Oklahoma State University. In that case, an animal activist and wealthy benefactor appeared to have pushed OSU to cancel a \$30 million, multiyear federally funded project involving primates (RRC 12/09, p. 1).

### **Attackers Have Many Targets**

Attacks also come in the form of legislation, Jentsch said, citing the Great Ape Protection Act, which would ban federal funding of invasive research on great apes and require the retirement of all such animals under federal control and ownership (RRC 3/09, p. 1).

He said such legislative efforts that attempt to “steer or change the course of science” are often part of public relations efforts that “provide less than complete information...about the impact of this legislation on biomedical research.”

Most damaging and “distressing” is the use of personal attacks, Jentsch said, which involve harassment by e-mail, “going to people’s homes and threatening them there with violence, and other forms of really insidious activities.”

“The point is that there is tremendous personal cost [to] being the public voice for biomedical research, and that’s difficult for people to understand and difficult for people to accept.”

Violence is on the upswing, Jentsch said, because members of the animal rights extremist movement have decided that this is the most efficient and effective way to shut down the research and achieve their goals. “The movement is full of all sorts of people who try to use whatever method is at their disposal to achieve the

end...no more biomedical research involving animals in the United States of America,” he said.

### **Media Office Can Help**

Jentsch laid out a number of avenues of response to such threats. In 2009, Jentsch and others formed Pro-Test for Science, modeled after a group in the United Kingdom that advocates for animal research. He also serves on the board of directors of Americans for Medical Progress and is a member of the executive committee of Speaking of Research (for more details, see p. 3).

“First and foremost, the leaders of our academic institutions should, without hesitation, support the research programs at the university and the investigators who do them,” he said, urging investigators at the meeting to “go home today and talk with the members of your campus administration about what they’re going to do to promote the research agenda of their university.”

Yet this is a shared responsibility, Jentsch said. “You shouldn’t leave this task to them...you should take on the role because you are the scientist; it’s your work.”

“[A]bsent all these other issues, the public supports the work that we do [through] a very large investment in the National Science Foundation, National Institutes of Health...and have a right to understand what we do and why,” he said.

Remember that journalists have an important role to play, in helping to explain to the public where their tax dollars are going, Jentsch said.

“Work with the media offices and make sure they know of scientists who will openly discuss research,” Jentsch said. “Use these methods to coordinate effective public outreach about the research that’s being carried out at your university. Collaborate with the media relations office at your university. Ask them for help and advice, but don’t shy away from speaking for yourself. Use the mechanisms the campus has to describe what’s going on, describe what the benefits are, and describe how you have actually adjusted and refined your research to actually attend to things like animal welfare. You can take a visible role yourself. Speak openly about what you do, given the chance.”

Researchers uncomfortable talking directly to the media can express themselves in other ways, including by issuing “controlled messages,” such as opinion pieces to run in daily newspapers or on blogs, Jentsch suggested.

Ultimately, the battle must be waged, he said.

“We have to be forceful, we have to be persistent, organized, and thoughtful, and most importantly, we need to take the messages we’ve heard here home and

spread them as widely as possible," Jentsch said. "It's up to scientists and people who work in the scientific enterprise to do this."

### Dialogue May Ease Tensions

Ringach spoke about his efforts to engage in discussions with those who oppose animal research, noting that last February, Pro-Test held a "dialogue," or panel discus-

sion, with Bruins for Animals, a UCLA student animal rights organization. (For more information, see [http://scienceblogs.com/ethicsandscience/2010/02/some\\_preliminary\\_thoughts\\_on\\_t.php](http://scienceblogs.com/ethicsandscience/2010/02/some_preliminary_thoughts_on_t.php).)

He said it is important to the debate to understand that many people have what they term "ethical" concerns about the research, when, in fact, they really don't understand its value.

## In Combating Opposition, Where to Go for Help; How to Help

The following is a list of some organizations, both in the United States and abroad, that support animal research. The brief descriptions are from the organizations' websites.

◆ **Pro-Test** ([www.pro-test.org.uk](http://www.pro-test.org.uk)). "We are an Oxford-based group campaigning in favour of continued animal testing and in support of scientific research. We aim to dispel the irrational myths promoted by anti-vivisectionists and to encourage people to stand up for science and human progress."

◆ **Pro-Test for Science** ([www.ucla-pro-test.org](http://www.ucla-pro-test.org)). "Following in the footsteps of the Pro-Test Group in Oxford, U.K., students and scientists at UCLA have pledged to stand up against the lies and misinformation of animal rights groups, and the violence of extremist organizations. They have formed the group Pro-Test for Science (formerly UCLA Pro-Test), which stands for science, reasoned discourse, and the belief that life-saving medical research must continue without violence and harassment."

◆ **Americans for Medical Progress** ([www.am-progress.org](http://www.am-progress.org)). "We focus on public outreach that builds understanding and appreciation for necessary and humane animal research. We also provide vital news, information and analysis to biomedical research stakeholders to ensure they have the resources they need to deflect campaigns that threaten the future of medical progress."

◆ **Speaking of Research** (<http://speakingofresearch.com>). "Speaking of Research is a campus-oriented group in the United States that seeks to provide university students and faculty with accurate information and resources about the importance of animal research in medical science."

◆ **National Association for Biomedical Research** ([www.nabr.org](http://www.nabr.org)). "Founded in 1979, ...NABR provides the unified voice for the scientific community on legislative and regulatory matters affecting laboratory animal research. NABR works to safeguard the future of biomedical research on behalf of its more than 300 public and private universities, medical and veterinary

schools, teaching hospitals, voluntary health agencies, professional societies, pharmaceutical and biotech industries, and other animal research-related firms that are: (1) involved directly in the use of animals in biomedical research and are (2) committed to the responsible and humane use of these animals."

◆ **Foundation for Biomedical Research** ([www.fbr-research.org](http://www.fbr-research.org)). "Established in 1981, ...FBR is the nation's oldest and largest organization dedicated to improving human and veterinary health by promoting public understanding and support for humane and responsible animal research. Through its innovative educational programs, FBR works to inform the news media, teachers, students and parents, pet owners, and other groups about the essential need for lab animals in medical and scientific research and discovery."

◆ **Pennsylvania Society of Biomedical Research** ([www.psbr.org](http://www.psbr.org)). "PSBR was established by universities, medical schools, pharmaceutical firms, and professional societies in the Commonwealth to foster a better understanding of the benefits of biomedical research to human and animal health, as well as the necessity for the humane treatment of animals in such research. The society supports the responsible use of animals for essential medical research and education in the prevention and treatment of human and animal diseases."

◆ **Basel Declaration** ([www.basel-declaration.org](http://www.basel-declaration.org)). "During a two-day conference in Basel, around 80 life sciences researchers from Switzerland, Germany, Sweden, France, and Great Britain addressed the problems of animal research. The outcome of this meeting was the Basel Declaration, in which the conference scientists commit to a responsible approach to the handling of animals in animal research, acknowledge the 3R principles (Replace, Reduce, Refine) and also apply these principles at all times. At the same time, the signatories of the declaration emphasize that necessary research involving animals remain[s] allowed now and in the future."

“There is a growing idea that the work is not valuable at all,” Ringach said. Referring to the survey Jentsch cited, Ringach said that “many of the people who answered that the work is unethical did so with the belief that the work actually does not help to move medical human research forward, that we are just animal researchers because of other considerations...it brings money to the university, because it pays our salaries, and that’s about it.”

Given this, “explaining the science is critical,” Ringach said. “If we don’t get the scientific facts right, we are not on the same page. It is very difficult to have the ethical discussion. When we are challenged with explaining why the work is ethical, we can’t just reply that all of our research is done according to the regulations. That’s not the ethical explanation. We have to add a good ethical reason for justifying the research,” he said.

Ringach said the goal of dialogue is to not only justify the research to those who may question it but to possibly deflate the argument of extremists.

“If we engage in such a dialogue, I think there’s a chance — and this is just a hope — that this will make the

lives of these small groups that advocate violence more difficult because they are not just going to be able to point to us and say ‘they don’t want to talk,’” Ringach said.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Jerry Collins, with OLAW’s division of policy and education and a professor of anesthesiology at Yale University, thanked participants for their contributions during the conference and to the system of animal care and research in general.

“We gathered together to celebrate the system that was created to take care of the animals to assess the appropriateness of the work that was being done and to move forward in the improvement of human health,” Collins said.

It is important, he said, “to describe the steps that have been taken in the last 25 years to improve the health of animals, to advance science, and to address concerns, legitimate concerns, that were raised about the care of animals.”

**Link:** <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/olaw/seminar/index.html>. ↵

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