REPORTS AND COMMENTS

Animals used in research

Many of the improvements in the welfare of laboratory animals over the last 10 or so years have come about through the application of the principles of the 3 Rs: *replacement, reduction* and *refinement*, originally put forward in 1959 by Russell and Burch[1]. More recently the term *alternatives* is being used to mean, in a precise sense, *replacement* and less precisely all three of the Rs. Application of these principles has resulted in a decrease in the number of animals used and a lessening of the amount of suffering. These developments have been welcomed by the scientific community and the legislators as well as by animal welfarists.

There seems, however, little in the way of simple guidance material published in the UK to help biomedical scientists, and especially those starting on projects which could involve the use of animals, to assess the possible role of *alternatives* in their investigations. This omission seems a little surprising as the *Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986*, requires that 'The Secretary of State shall not grant a project licence until he is satisfied that the applicant has given adequate consideration to the feasibility of achieving the purpose of the programme to be specified in the licence by means not involving the use of protected animals'.

Other countries have been more forthcoming in helping their scientists to assess the alternative options. The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) of Australia, for example, published a simple three page introductory guide on minimizing the number of animals used in research projects and a 26 page background paper on the strategies underlying the suggestions in the guide. These documents have been produced to help institutional animal experimentation ethics committees — bodies which play a central role in the Australian system of regulation of animal experimentation — and individual scientists to work out methods of reducing animal usage. It is suggested that this can be done through:-

— not repeating experiments unnecessarily;
— using the best statistical techniques;
— using computer and predictive techniques wherever possible;
— pooling of research;
— using the most appropriate animal species;
— using alternative techniques and subjects instead of animals.

It is certainly possible to criticize some of the points made in these publications but they do seriously, and in many ways successfully, assess the ways in which *alternatives*

[1] **Russell W M S, Burch R L** 1959 *The Principles of Humane Experimental Technique*. Methuen & Co Ltd: London. Reprinted as a **Special Edition** 1992 Universities Federation for Animal Welfare: Potters Bar

can and cannot be applied, and the means by which animal usage may be reduced.

A new publication *The Use of Alternatives* is currently planned by UFAW, in association with the Fund for Replacement of Animals in Medical Experiments, as Section V in its series of *Guidelines on the Care of Laboratory Animals and their Use for Scientific Purposes.* This might help overcome the lack of comprehensive guidance for scientists in the UK.

NHMRC 1990 *An Introductory Guide to Minimizing the Numbers of Animals Used in Research Projects*. 3 Pp. *Background Paper Strategies for Minimizing the Numbers of Animals Used in Research Projects*. 26 Pp. National Health and Medical Research Council: Canberra, Australia.

European Community - common welfare standards

There has been considerable consultative and committee work in the UK over the last 3 years on the transport of animals. Most of this was related to a draft Regulation issued by the Commission in June 1989 and circulated for comment to over 80 interested organizations, by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in 1989 and subsequently in 1990. Earlier in April 1990, the House of Commons Agriculture Committee started an independent inquiry on this subject and in November 1990 the Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) set up a working group to look at the EC proposals.

In October 1991 the new EC legislation — now a Directive[1] and not a Regulation — was agreed by the Council of Agriculture Ministers and the text was published in the Official Journal in December that year. The sequence of these events is shown in the diagram.

The provisions of this Directive will now have to be incorporated into UK legislation by 1st January 1993 and this may mean a number of important changes in welfare standards.

Existing UK regulations require that food animals in transit must be offered food and water every 12 hours or exceptionally every 15 hours. The Directive sets a general maximum period of 24 hours, exceptionally 26 hours, although it makes provision for a Scientific Veterinary Committee report by July 1992 recommending maximum journey times for certain types of animal.

Fortunately the existing UK protection of minimum values applicable to the export of horses has been allowed to continue for the time being.

[1] *Council Directive on the protection of animals during transport*. 91/628/EEC of 19 November 1991, OJ L.340.