

Feasibility of Collecting and Reporting Data on Severity of Procedures Regulated Under the UK's Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986

In the UK, as in many other countries, scientific procedures may be permitted under licence in cases where it is judged that the benefits are likely to outweigh the costs, in terms of the adverse welfare impact on the animals involved. In the UK, it is the Home Office that is responsible for making this judgment, rather than regional ethical review committees as is the case in some other countries. The Home Office publishes statistics annually on the number of licences in force and the severity band (mild, moderate or substantial) of the procedures that they cover. These statistics report on the predicted severity of the procedures to be undertaken as assessed at the time the licence application was submitted and subject to the cost/benefit judgment and do not include any data on assessments of the actual welfare impacts associated with the procedures.

Various bodies (eg the House of Lords Select Committee, the APC, and the Nuffield Council on Bioethics) have recommended recently that better information should be provided on actual welfare impact. In response to this, the UK's Animal Procedures Committee, which advises the Government on matters relating to the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, and the Laboratory Animal Science Association (LASA), convened a working group, under the Chairmanship of Dr David Smith (LASA President), to assess the feasibility of collecting and reporting on the actual welfare severity of procedures.

The report published by this working group in December 2005 (see details below), addresses the various challenges associated with assessing the welfare impacts, drawing attention, for example, to the difficulties of producing a relatively simple but meaningful summary of welfare over the period of a study. Amongst other things, they concluded that '*Combining intensity and duration into single severity codes... would likely cause significant difficulties in interpreting the data reported*'. They explored the use of two intensity-duration grids, one relating to maximum severity and the other relating to severity over the rest of the procedure and found that '*feedback from licence holders suggests that the system is understandable, intuitive to apply and acceptable in terms of its capacity to portray the severity of adverse effects in more complex procedures*'.

It is noted in the report that all the members of the working group considered that introduction of a retrospective severity assessment process would be beneficial. Further work is proposed to develop the ideas further.

This is a valuable contribution to a very important subject. A huge amount of time and effort has been devoted to trying to establish methods of animal welfare assessment in recent years and very similar sorts of initiatives are underway relating to other sectors of the animal keeping industry. Hopefully, as this project develops it may contribute to the

thinking regarding welfare assessment and surveillance of farmed, companion, zoo and wild animals and vice versa. After all, how meaningful for society could assessments of the welfare of animals kept for scientific procedures be if they could not be compared (at least in the same kind of units) with the welfare of animals kept for other purposes?

Reporting on the Severity of Animal Procedures Retrospectively (December 2005). Report of a LASA/APC Pilot Study to assess the feasibility of collecting and reporting data on the severity of adverse effects caused to animals used in scientific procedures regulated under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. Published by the Animal Procedures Committee 38 pp. Copies available at the Committee's website: www.apc.org.uk

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Overseas Supply of Non-human Primates to UK Laboratories

Primates are imported into the UK for use in research and testing because insufficient numbers of some species are bred in the country. The Home Office (the Government Department responsible for regulation of the use of animals in scientific procedures) is responsible for permitting the importation of consignments of primates from overseas breeding centres depending upon its judgment as to the acceptability of these centres. Broad criteria relating to acceptability were established by the Home Office in 1996 but the Animal Procedures Committee has recently been undertaking a review of the issues surrounding acceptance of overseas supply centres. The resulting report (see details below), published in February 2006, outlines the background and makes a number of recommendations regarding the development of a more structured system of assessment and the acceptance process and '*so that there is a clear audit trail of the decisions made in each case*'.

Specifically, the recommendations include that all overseas centres should have a clear strategy designed to help them achieve the required minimum standards (set out in this report) and that, after initial acceptance, all centres should be revisited by the Home Office inspectorate at two-yearly intervals with additional visits if necessary.

The report states that many overseas breeding centres are not self-sustaining in breeding animals and depend upon wild populations for replenishment of breeding stock. The report recommends that '*the UK should move toward a position where it will only accept purpose-bred animals of the second or subsequent generations bred in captivity*'.

Acceptance of overseas centres supplying non-human primates to UK laboratories (February 2006). Report by the Primates Sub-Committee of the Animal Procedures Committee. 20 pp Published by the Animal Procedures Committee and available at the Committee's website: www.apc.org.uk

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