Comment

Is a Compromise Possible in Russia Between Animal Advocates and Researchers Who Use Animals in Harmful Experiments?

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Summary — The current situation relating to the use of laboratory animals in Russia, which is primarily characterised by the complete absence of legislation for their protection, is examined and discussed. This lack of regulation causes well-founded protests by animal protection organisations and a number of reputable politicians. It also has a negative influence on the quality of medical and biological research results that are obtained through the use of experimental animals in Russia. The opinion is expressed that the Russian scientific community should be able to build upon the experience of other countries — in particular, members of the European Union, where there is an effective system of self-control over the ethical and legislative regulation of animal-based research. It is suggested that, in Russia, the basic animal protection principles of the Three Rs should be introduced, when the decision on whether to finance scientific projects involving the use of animals is being made.

Key words: experimental integrity, laboratory animals in Russia, Three Rs principles.

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Introduction

In modern Russia, where a democratic society is in the process of being formed, a new phenomenon has been encountered, in the form of protests by animal advocates against the use of animals in experimental procedures which are liable to cause them harm. In some cases, these protests turn into dramatic and radical events. The most radical animal advocates campaign for a full prohibition of such experiments. They base their argument on the animal rights philosophy, and on the opinions of a number of scientists who work in the world of medicine and seek to prove the senselessness of animal-based medical and biological research (see, for instance, 1 and 2).

With regard to the use of animals in experimental procedures which are liable to cause harm to them, one must mention that, in the modern world, the prevalent opinion on such research experiments — cruel ones included — is that they are a necessity for medicine to flourish (3, 4). However, the opinion of animal advocates is also taken into account, as indeed it should be in democratic society. If we look at the experience of civilised countries, we will see that animal-based research is subject to strict public control (see, for example, 5–10). Unfortunately, at this point of time, Russia belongs to another part of the world, and few people there are concerned about the ethical issues and the legislative protection of animals. Russia has no special laws protecting animals from cruelty, nor has it a legislative base for regulating animal-based research. There are, however, some governmental acts that regulate the procedures for animal experiments, but these were issued 30 years ago, during Soviet times. That is why their validity in today’s Russia is doubtful in many situations, from the judicial point of view. That is why their validity in today’s Russia is doubtful in many situations, from the judicial point of view. An important point to note, which is not widely known, is that a new law protecting animals from cruelty, in which modern legislative regulations/norms were established, was approved by the Duma (Russian parliament) and the Council of Federation in 1999, but was subsequently vetoed by Acting-President Vladimir Putin, due to some judicial disparities. Unfortunately, attempts to restart work toward securing a new version of this law in the Duma, have so far been unsuccessful.