

Emotional Connections – The Language of Animal-Based Research

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To begin, I'll acknowledge the millions of native animals and birds injured, dying and dead because of old forest logging in Tasmania and the chemicals used to kill any animals that remain after the chainsaws leave. Not only do animals die in labs to test these poisons, millions more die in agony, in their own habitat from consuming them.

Today I'd like to examine just a few of the many ways that the vivisection industry uses emotion to manipulate the public into believing that experiments on animals are necessary for the health and wellbeing of humans. The four examples I've chosen highlight the way vivisection has been marketed to the public, to make an otherwise unacceptable situation acceptable.

I'll start with the statement, "**Animal Experiments Save Lives**". Although the idea of small animals in sterile labs may be abhorrent, their sacrifice to save human lives needs no further justification....; so the emotion generated here is a comforting sense of **satisfaction**.

Then I'll be looking at the statement, "**It's the dog or your child**". Nothing could strike more **fear** into the heart of a parent than the serious illness of their child. By presenting this hypothetical scenario as if there is no other choice, medical research is guaranteed a willing public.

Next I'll address the issue of '**The Breakthrough**', with all the **hope** that it generates in the minds of people suffering and dying of known and new illnesses.

And finally we'll look at the institution of the '**Ethics Committee**'. These committees were created as the means by which the use of animals in research could be regulated and monitored, in line with the National Code of Practice. Members of the public are involved in decisions about experiment protocols, ostensibly ensuring a degree of transparency and keeping the public conscience clear. The emotion targeted here is **reassurance** - that all is under control and nothing too bad is done to the animals. To reinforce that reassurance, Australians are even invited to compare our superior lab animal protection with countries that don't have these committees.

Years ago vivisection was hidden away from the public. Chemical testing, medical research, drug development, agribusiness, psychology experiments, vehicle & weapon development – all these areas of R&D used multi-millions of animals as test subjects and were unaccountable as far as the nature and number of experiments done. Then in the late 20th century, several key researchers from the industry started breaking ranks and speaking out publicly about the cruelty to animals, the fraudulent nature of animal-based research as far as its relevance to human health was concerned and the enormous amount of money at stake in the continuation of vivisection.

At the same time, several very tragic human health disasters occurred and the public began to question the system and demand greater transparency from those research institutions that had been trusted to make human health and welfare a priority. In response, with everything at stake, the vivisection industry used the only weapon they could, to ensure the maintenance of the status quo – emotional blackmail.

Most people oppose cruelty to animals. The stereo-typical image of the mad scientist in the lab, with animals in dark, crowded conditions screaming in terror and subjected to horrific procedures was a hard one to change but, after years of preying on people's fear of dying and by continually resorting to the 'us or them' scenario, today we have reached the stage where media reports of so-called medical breakthroughs can confidently include a statement about for example, a drug being successful in animal trials. Sometimes even video footage is shown. And, being so keen for quick-fix health solutions, the general public buys it, satisfied that all is on track in the labs of the world, for human disease to be controlled, even cured by animal-tested-safe drugs, chemicals and medical techniques. So the international 'illness industry' continues to prosper.

“The history of cancer research has been a history of curing cancer in the mouse. We have cured mice of cancer for decades and it simply didn’t work in humans”.
Dr. Richard Klausner. National Cancer Institute US.

So firstly let’s look at:

‘Animal experiments save lives’

The power of this claim is undeniable in terms of its emotional effect and ease of use but it is an incomplete statement. Unfortunately, the whole story is not so comforting.

To quote Ray & Jean Greek:

‘Animal experiments have diverted funds from reliable approaches to medical research that have proven their tremendous value in easing human suffering and prolonging life. Penicillin, cyclosporine, heart valve replacement, the statins, antidepressant medications and many other important medicines and tools were delayed because of misleading test results in animals....vaccines and drugs tested safe in animals killed humans, while cigarette smoking, environmental poisons such as asbestos and glass fibres and (the condition of) high cholesterol were originally found to be safe in humans based on animal tests.’

A prime example of vivisection’s poor predictivity for humans is tobacco research, or more broadly, lung cancer research. Because animal experimentation did not link cigarette smoking with lung cancer as clinical and epidemiological evidence had, warning labels on cigarettes were delayed for years.

So we have funds diverted, funds wasted, inaccuracies of extrapolating results & delays to the use of effective medicines – however there are even worse aspects to the claim that animal experiments save lives.

Our society has come to rely on the use of chemicals- and the issue with chemicals is whether they are carcinogenic to people. According to a US study into the link between vivisection and environmental pollution, “From the staggering amounts of ambiguous, contradictory and invalid data compiled from animal toxicity tests, scientists and chemical manufacturers arrive at the conclusions necessary to support the required result” So there is by now, enough evidence to prove or disprove the carcinogenicity of any one chemical. Dr Bruce Ames of the Environmental Health Sciences Centre at the University of California adds; “Important human carcinogens may not be detected in standard tests in rodents; this was true for a long time for both tobacco smoke and alcohol, the two largest identified causes of neo-plastic death in the US.”

Drug testing follows the same formula as toxicity testing. To quote Andre Menache, Animal Aid UK’s scientific consultant, “These tests involve force-feeding animals by gavage (a long tube pushed right down to the stomach) or injection or both, or animals are sealed in an airtight chamber and forced to inhale vapour.” Drugs are required to be tested on a rodent species and non-human primate before going to clinical trials however, pharmaceutical researchers choose the animals that will give them the results they need to get a drug onto the market as quickly as possible and recoup the production expenditure.

Quoting Andrew Knight; “Traditional animal carcinogenicity tests take about 3 years to design, conduct and interpret. Consequently only a tiny fraction of the thousands of industrial chemicals in use have yet been tested... Despite the cost of millions of dollars, millions of man-hours and millions of animal lives, several investigations have revealed animal carcinogenicity data to be lacking in human specificity... The advantages of non-animal assays when compared to bioassays include superior human specificity results, greatly reduced timeframes, and greatly reduced demands on financial, personnel and animal resources. Inexplicably, however, regulatory agencies have been frustratingly slow to adopt alternative protocols. In order to minimize cancer losses to society, a redirection of resources away fromrodent bioassays...is strongly justified and urgently required.”

Molecular assay systems (test-tube test) can show how human and animal bacterial cells react when exposed to various compounds. These speed up the process and enable scientists to test 1000s of substances at the same time – something that is impossible with animal studies. Even Charles Rivers, the biggest animal supply and contract testing company in the world, has reduced by half its lab-animal business, to provide faster, more accurate results. To quote their spokesperson “It’s driven by pure necessity and economics”.

So we can see that not only is the reliance on the results of animal-testing fraudulent and outdated, it is also contributing to the huge increase of illness and death in the population.

***“Those who won’t hesitate to vivisect, won’t hesitate to lie about it.”
George Bernard Shaw***

‘It’s your child or the dog’

Now I’ll look at the example that was actually the impetus for this talk and which I mentioned in the abstract. It is an emotional furbury of the highest order and deserves a critique from a far more knowledgeable person than I, however today I’ll discuss just 2 interpretations of this ridiculous claim, made so glibly and so often, by the misinformed.

1. Firstly, to repeat the quote that swung my friend from abolitionist to supporter of vivisection, “If your child was dying of a disease and a cure could possibly be developed if some tests were done on an animal, wouldn’t you want those tests done?” The answer to this question is invariably ‘yes’, but even if the question was modified to replace ‘animals’ with say, ‘the neighbour’s child’, the answer would still be ‘yes’. The other option will always be preferable. This people-friendly explanation of medical research rationale targets people’s basic instincts to care for & protect their children. This is in no way presents a valid choice. And anyway, it is ridiculous and intellectually insulting to state that we have a black and white situation here, that there are only ever 2 paths to choose from.

2. Secondly, to suggest that a cure for a human illness can be found through experiments or tests on dogs or any other animals is both bizarre - and tragic. There are mountains of documented evidence of cruelty to dogs in labs, of the betrayal of selling shelter dogs and greyhounds to labs and of the futility of using dogs to model humans. Hideous experiments and testing procedures continue to be done in hellholes like Huntingdon in the UK and reported by undercover workers there. We cannot change past horrors but with a true belief in the principle of “do no harm”; we can ensure that this shameful history does not continue to be repeated.

As a final comment on this topic; at the Anzccart conference last year, we heard the chair of a university ethics committee state that if she had to, she would kill every dog in Australia to save her son’s life. This ludicrous statement highlights the deeply flawed approach to medical research that exists in Australian institutions today. Not only does emotion completely over-ride rationale and logic, it also excludes the huge amount of data and scientific reports on the impossibility of extrapolating results from animal experiments to humans and highlights yet another reason that Australia is stuck in static tradition.

***“When the necessity is removed from a necessary evil, all that remains is the evil.”
Andrew Knight BSc. BVMS. CertAW. MRCV
First Australian Veterinary student with colleague to win the right to not kill animals in the 4th year
terminal surgical lab classes***

‘The Breakthrough’

Almost weekly now, a media release is made about a breakthrough in the cure for a disease. This creates hope in the public and an emotional connection to research which people trust is working for their benefit. Results from animal trials claim to show promise for the clinical application - in 10 years time. Funding is ensured but how often are the follow-up stories presented? And never are the gory details of the experiments revealed - animals are infected with a human disease, have bones broken, skulls sawn open, eyes sewn shut, are forced to consume massive doses of poison and so on. Selective truths are the comfortable zone of the researchers using animals.

To quote Professor David Findlay, of Adelaide University – “Cancer research depends on animal models. There is no safe and responsible way to bypass the testing of drugs in animals before use in humans. Only those drugs which are found most promising by testing in cells are further tested in animals. Cells cannot model the complexity of the living animal or human.”

But to quote Dr Richard Klausner, National Cancer Institute US;
'The most significant trend in modern research has been the recognition that animals are rarely good models for the human body...Researchers are often wasting lives and precious resources trying to infect animals with diseases that they never would normally contract. The world's most forward thinking scientists have accepted this and moved on to other methods.'

Animal-based breakthroughs are a myth however, there are many exciting and significant breakthroughs happening around the world.

Pharmagen Laboratories in Royston England has rejected all animal studies. The pharmaceutical company uses computer technologies that show the effects of chemicals on the human body. Pharmagene co-founder Gordon Baxter say, "If you have information on human genes, what's the point of going back to animals?"

Physiome Sciences in New Jersey has developed software programs that simulate the human body's organs and processes. Its computer model of the heart is so advanced that it can be used to predict the heart's reaction to pharmaceutical compounds, eliminating the use of animals.

TOPKAT is a software package that allows researchers to predict the oral toxicity and the degree of skin and eye irritation of chemicals. It is faster, cheaper, and more accurate than animal tests and is now used by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the U.S. Army.

PETA persuaded the U.S. Department of Transportation (DoT) to stop using animals to test corrosive substances. Now, the DoT uses Corrositex, a test in which substances are applied to a protein membrane instead of being smeared onto rabbits' backs and eating through their skin.

The Irritation Assay System has spared millions of animals from blinding eye- and skin-irritation tests. This simple test-tube procedure is used by many personal-care product manufacturers. Scientists can now "grow" artificial human skin for skin grafts and for skin-irritation testing. The National Cancer Registry and other disease-reporting mechanisms reveal exactly what is happening to people under all kinds of conditions and tell us more about human disease than animal studies ever will. DNA studies are unlocking the doors to human illness and birth defects.

To quote the StopAnimalTests.com site that this information comes from; "these studies show us that trying to learn about the human body by experimenting on animals is like trying to drive from Boston to San Francisco using a map of France".

'Ethics Committees, however, do not tend to question the 'ethics' underlying the experiments; they simply refine experiments. In this way they can be seen to justify experimentation.'
Category C member, name withheld.

Ethics committees protect animals in labs

Lastly, I'll speak about the so-called safety measure of having ethics committees to ensure that the best result is obtained with the least harm; in other words, to stay within the NHMRC Code of Practice guidelines and reassure government and the public.

People want to believe that animal experiments are somehow not causing pain, to be reassured that everyone is doing the right thing however, the reality of the ethics committee is a very different story.

To quote again Professor Findlay:

'...All animal work is conducted with close scrutiny by independent animal ethics committees, in order to minimize suffering of animals used in research, to reduce the number of animals being used to an absolute minimum and avoid the use of animals where possible.'

Findlay is referring to the 3Rs here. According to the Code of Practice, the 3Rs can be achieved by using non- animal alternatives wherever possible and by researchers working towards the goal of elimination of animal-based research.

But, how many Category C&D members are able to keep up with non-animal alternatives to protocols that they have to vote on or databases identifying repetition of experiments? How many can even fully understand the presentation by researchers, to be able to comment constructively on the protocols?

A quote from a Category C member on an AEC

"...a Cat C person is unlikely to effectively make their voice heard for 3 reasons. First, they are often outnumbered; secondly they may not be confident to speak up when in conference with doctors and professors and finally, they are unlikely to have the scientific ability to understand the detail of the protocol before them and come up with an effective argument."

And another;

"I certainly don't understand all the protocols. ...Sometimes all members of the committee, even the scientists admit they don't fully grasp what the experiment is about. I tend to concentrate on specific areas such as animal housing, monitoring and pain relief...I am certain that my lack of knowledge prevents me from fully comprehending what the animals are going through."

After hearing many similar statements from the Category C&D members of AECs charged with the animal welfare aspects of evaluating protocols, the conclusion is that far from adhering to the aims of the Code of Practice and promoting non-animal methods of research, the underlying function of AECs is to approve experiments and perpetuate the 'animals-in-research' industry.

A serious investigation of the nature and causes of human illnesses today will reveal a huge amount of documentation on the inadequacy, the irrelevance and the outright danger of trusting the results of animal-based research into human disease. Any rational person must wonder why it continues. Surely medical and pharmaceutical researchers want to save lives. This is what research is supposed to be about isn't it? The costs to governments of human illness are rising daily, almost out of control; so something must be fundamentally wrong with the system.

Last year Andre Menache was in Australia to discuss the need for a systematic review of all research into human illness that is based on the animal model. His research proves convincingly that only by adopting non-animal methods and technologies can we hope to address the health problems endemic in our society.

Unfortunately Australian research remains in the grip of tradition - and tradition fears change. As far as adopting innovative, speedy, reliable technologies that don't use animals, we are lagging way behind. Instead of continuing to prop up a failing system with platitudes and comforting but invalid justifications, it is a matter of urgency that Australian laboratories adopt proven non-animal research tools and methods as soon as possible.

Vital Sites

www.aahr.org.au

www.curedisease.com

www.animalconsultants.org

www.animalaid.org.uk

www.stopanimaltests.com

www.arcc.org.au