



MEDIA RELEASE

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Leo escapes from the Lab

For most animals unfortunate enough to be designated as mere 'tools for research' their only escape from the laboratory is an injection of lethabarb*. For one lucky cat however, a very different fate lay ahead...

Background: 'Leo' had been part of a study aimed at improving surgical techniques for vision correction in humans. His nictitating membranes (third eyelids) had been surgically removed, but unlike several other cats, he was not implanted with contact lenses as he was part of a control group. Prior to this, he had been used in vaccination studies at another facility.

Humane Research Australia's Chief Executive, Helen Marston, said today: *"While clearly there is an ethical argument against using sentient animals as mere 'research tools', there are also scientific reasons that suggest they are not the best mode of research. Animals differ anatomically, genetically and metabolically from humans, which means that any data derived from animal experiments cannot be extrapolated to humans with sufficient accuracy."*

This is what a veterinary expert says about Leo:

The use of cats or other animals to test biomaterials (in this case, contact lens) is no more scientific or predictive of what will happen in humans, than tossing a coin. The cat model is incapable of telling the researchers whether the lens actually improves vision and cannot predict human-only complications, especially problems that will develop in the long-term.

Human tissue culture and human immune simulators could be used as a first step to test the biocompatibility of the lens. In addition, there are already well established protocols for implanting various types of lens in humans. If, for any reason, the lens is unsuitable, it can be removed and replaced with a more appropriate lens. Any surgical procedure of this nature will always carry some risk, but it is disingenuous for researchers or medical companies to pretend that the animal model will reliably predict human outcome.

Dr Andre Menache, MRCVS, South African veterinary graduate

Leo today: Like so many others caught up in the multi-billion dollar industry of vivisection, Leo's only value was deemed to be what data could be derived from him. Today he lives in a safe and happy environment with a carer who values Leo as an individual rather than a statistic or a 'tool for research'.

Ms Marston concluded: *"Leo might only represent a tiny percentage of those animals used in research every year, but that just shows the enormity of the situation. Each one of those 7 million + animals is just as precious and just as deserving as Leo. Sadly, they don't all have a happy ending."*

(PHOTOS AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST)

*Or whatever method of killing is deemed most appropriate for the species according to *the Code of practice for the care and use of animals in scientific procedures 2004*.