

MEDIA RELEASE

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Humane Research Australia responds to Monash statement on media reports about greyhounds in cruel experiments

Humane Research Australia (HRA) recently published on its website a [“case study”](#) on greyhounds used in heart transplant research. It involved the use of 12 greyhounds whose hearts were removed, preserved for four hours and then transplanted.

Due to much international media coverage, Monash issued a [statement](#) defending the experiment.

HRA therefore takes this opportunity to respond to that statement.

The paper in question is titled *“A novel Combination Technique of Cold Crystalloid Perfusion But Not Cold Storage Facilitates Transplantation of Canine Hearts Donated After Circulatory Death – Cold crystalloid perfusion for DCD heart preservation.”* It is a manuscript accepted for publication by the *Journal of Heart and Lung Transplantation* and can be accessed [via this link](#).

The study was a collaboration between Alfred Hospital and Monash University. According to [The Age](#), ***“A spokesman for The Alfred hospital said questions should be directed to Monash University, as staff who engage in research conduct their studies through the university.”*** In Monash University’s statement, their opening line reads ***“The researchers named in the publication do not have funding from Monash. The research was funded through the Alfred Hospital.”*** Is this a case of both institutions shirking accountability for this unethical use of dogs?

Monash stated ***“there were no other existing research alternatives, and the research was critically important.”***

HRA has questioned whether using canine hearts to test the viability of these perfusion methods and transplantation success has relevance to human heart transplantation – particularly as the researchers involved in the study themselves have previously conducted human studies¹, making it difficult to comprehend why they would conduct studies utilising hearts of a different species.

¹ Rosenfeld F, Ou R, Woodard J, Esmore D, Marasco S 2014. ‘Twelve-hour reanimation of a human heart following donation after circulatory death. *Heart, lung & circulation*, 23(1): 88-90.

It is HRA's understanding that the institutions would likely have ready access to the hearts of human donors (with asphyxiation as a cause of death such as asthmatic cardiac arrest donors). For example, poor quality donor human hearts, which are deemed not suited to transplant because their function is marginal, could be resuscitated in a humidicrib and left to observe for return of function in cold storage versus controlled perfusion, such as used in the study. It is also our understanding that the Alfred has an Organ Circulatory Support (Transmedics) machine and that this, and/or other methods, could have been utilised during this process rather than living greyhounds. Surely then, the use of human donor hearts and/or human-biology based methods would provide a suitable and far more reliable replacement to using greyhounds and canine hearts.

Monash also stated ***"The Humane Research Australia (HRA) report is either unintentionally inaccurate due to not understanding the details of the published manuscript or intentionally misleading. HRA incorrectly imply the procedure was performed on one animal. In reality there were two animals, a donor and a recipient as in the human transplant scenario."***

Having read the [publication](#), HRA contacted the ethics committee which approved this experiment seeking clarification on its interpretation of the study. We are yet to receive a response. We also sought advice from medical experts, which suggests that if the paper had indeed been misinterpreted then it has also been unclear to medical professionals. It should be noted that 12 dogs were discussed in the study as being donors, therefore if the hearts were transplanted to recipient animals, as Monash has now confirmed, this would equate to 24 dogs used in the study.

Finally, Monash stated that they have ***"not used dogs in medical research for over 12 months."***

HRA questions whether this is because they acknowledge that dogs are not appropriate models for studying human disease or that it is unacceptable to the public for dogs to be used in such a way? Either way, it would be a welcome move if Monash University made an official commitment to no longer use dogs in research.