

Animal experimentation in postgraduate training

Ramasamy Raveendran

Cheif Editor, JPP

Oftentimes, we Indians tend to become somewhat emotional and lose our balance as we get too involved in what we think is good for everyone. The animal rights activists in the country are no exception. Almost a decade ago, one well-known activist declared we did not need to develop new drugs as the existing drugs were enough and hence animal experiments must be banned. A similar genre of activism is in the news once again.

The article with the headline “Medical Council of India (MCI) likely to ban animal dissection at post-grad level too” in the Pioneer, a New Delhi based daily came as a rude shock to some of us (<http://www.dailypioneer.com/nation/mci-likely-to-ban-animal-dissection-at-post-grad-level-too.html>). The news is based on the information supplied by the People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) Indian Science Policy Adviser who reportedly said that PETA was working with the MCI to ban animal experiments in postgraduate (PG) education in order to comply with Environment Ministry guidelines [Figure 1].

It is unfortunate that PETA could not differentiate between the undergraduate (UG) and PG medical education. Although the UG curriculum aims at producing a basic doctor who does not require animal dissection skills, the PG education produces specialists who are supposed to acquire special skills. A pharmacologist with an MD degree is expected to possess skills in animal experimentation. He/she should be able to independently conduct animal experiments, which include

dissection of animals, data collection using various animal models and drugs, analysis of data and application of findings to carry out clinical trials. Hence, it is mandatory for a student during his training as a PG in pharmacology to develop skills, which he/she will be using in his career, irrespective of whether he/she gets employed in a research institute, medical school or industry. The knowledge and skill acquired by conducting animal experiments would be nonpareil.

Animal experiments still play a role in drug development whether one likes it or not. Though alternatives are being developed and touted to replace animals, regulatory agencies insist upon animal experimentation data to approve new drugs for human clinical trials and use. Banning the animal experiments in the PG level will not be in the best interest of anyone including the animal rights activists. We need researchers with skills in dissecting and conducting animal experiments (*in vivo* skills). Such skills can be imparted only during PG training and it is not just a part of the curriculum, but needed very much for capacity building.

In the West, the centers to train young scientists in *in vivo* skills were set up since they could not acquire such skills during their graduate and/or PG programs. The graduates tend to select kit based and *in vitro* studies and avoid *in vivo* animal studies probably because of negative propaganda against animal use in science. This resulted in a gap in the animal experimentation skills, which led to setting up of centers for training the scientists in *in vivo* skills.

While I am against the senseless killing and torture of animals, I am all for ethically acceptable animal experimentation to develop new drugs for humans. Very little is said and done about killing millions of animals for food, often in an inhumane manner, but using animals ethically for developing drugs for humans becomes politically incorrect. Although no animal rights activist in this country is against the use of animals for food,

Access this article online	
Quick Response Code:	Website: www.jpharmacol.com
	DOI: 10.4103/0976-500X.136095

Address for correspondence:

Ramasamy Raveendran, Department of Pharmacology, Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research, Puducherry, India. E-mail: dr.ravee@gmail.com



MCI LIKELY TO BAN ANIMAL DISSECTION AT POST-GRAD LEVEL TOO

Friday, 25 April 2014 | Pioneer News Service | New Delhi

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After banning dissection of animals in undergraduate medical curriculum, the Medical Council of India (MCI) is likely to make similar recommendations soon for post-graduate education too as directed by the Environment Ministry.

Sources in the MCI said that the education regulator has recently amended regulations to call for the use of modern non-animal teaching methods such as computer assisted modules in the medical colleges for teaching Physiology and Pharmacology, as per recent notification. Presently, medical students frequently use live mice, rats, guinea pigs, rabbits and frogs for training purpose. However, the new notification encourages usages of computer Assisted Learning modules/ simulators/videographs which are already available in the market.

“This is a tremendous victory for animals who will no longer be killed to teach medical students when humane, non-animal teaching methods have proved to be superior”, said PETA India Science Policy Adviser Dr Chaitanya Koduri. “PETA commends the Medical Council of India for modernising its teaching policies by no longer forcing students to be complicit in the painful deaths of animals,” he added. Koduri said that PETA is working with the MCI to make similar recommendations for post-graduate education in order to comply with Environment Ministry guidelines.

Figure 1: Screen shot of the pioneer online edition

they do not miss an opportunity to oppose the use of animals for experimentation. Of course, some of them are vegetarians and vegans, but I am yet to find one who says he/she does not take drugs, which were developed sacrificing animals. Human life is not perfect and is full of ironies. Animal rights activists should accept the fact that all their ideologies are not practicable, but satisfy themselves with the ethical use of animals in science. Such use needs training and that is what is given at the PG level.

I hope the MCI will not act in haste on the PETA's demand to ban animal experiments at PG level. The Journal of

Pharmacology and Pharmacotherapeutics will write to the MCI not to heed to the demands of the animal rights activists and thereby compromise the quality of medical education. It is hoped that such ideas and arguments that can compromise a fully rounded training for PGs in Pharmacology, will be nipped in the bud.

How to cite this article: Raveendran R. Animal experimentation in postgraduate training. J Pharmacol Pharmacother 2014;5:179-80.

Source of Support: Nil, **Conflict of Interest:** None declared.