



Meeting Report

European life science circle: the balance of human health and animal protection

Brussels, 26th February 2008

The revision of the Animal Directive 86/609 is entering a critical phase. A good time to inform policy makers, lobbyists and members of the European Parliament on the different aspects of animal research and animal protection. The European Life Science Circle, an initiative of Members of the European Parliament **Jorgo Chatzimarkakis**, **Philippe Busquin** and **Jerzy Buzek** are addressing such hot topics in short, focused evening meetings. On the 26th of February a meeting was held under the title "Animal research for medical progress – striking the right balance". **Jorgo Chatzimarkakis** introduced the evening by presenting the conflict of values requiring a legal compromise: the imperative to implement the 3R principle to the fullest versus the need for new medicines and the associated requirement for animal experiments in drug discovery and drug safety. **Jackie Hunter**, Senior Vice President of GSK, gave insight into the viewpoint of research-based pharmaceutical industry under the heading "Good science = better health". Her talk was a strong argument for the necessity and usefulness of animals for medical progress, but also gave reference to alternative methods that have dramatically reduced animal use in

relation to research output during the last years. Accordingly, animal research appears to presently make up about 10% of the drug discovery efforts in relation to other methods. In this presentation an example from the field of Alzheimer's disease was used to demonstrate the apparently absolute requirement of animal experiments for drug development. It was argued that the development of serotonin receptor blockers (5-HT6) as potential new cognition-enhancing drugs required *in vivo* experimentation at different pivotal decision points during the discovery process. This argument was taken up in the next talk under the heading "Good welfare = good science". **Marcel Leist**, Professor of Alternative *in vitro* Methods at the University of Konstanz (Germany), talked about the value of the 3R principle and the losses for science and pharmaceutical development if research was based only on animals. Coming back to examples of Alzheimer's medicines, he demonstrated that memantine, a drug that has revolutionized the medical treatment of this disease was discovered using cell cultures and would never have made it to use in patients if animal studies had been trusted in. After having introduced the audience to the problem of

validation of alternative methods and the necessity to bring together regulators and method developers, he launched a strong appeal to the policy makers not to forget the overall goal behind all statistics and animal counting: reduction of suffering and introduction of humane principles by replacing but also reducing and refining animal experiments. This theme was taken up in the third talk by **Jean-Francois Dechamp** from the European Commission, who gave an overview of the ethical considerations underlying EU policy in general and the revision of Directive 86/609 in particular. Finally, **Jerzy Buzek**, Member of the European Parliament, spoke of the societal concerns linked to this topic and the high responsibility of all stakeholders to work on good solutions for the future. The subsequent discussion proved that the audience was highly interested and technically informed. One of the important themes was that 3R approaches lag behind their great potential, often for lack of knowledge, of education or of confidence of potential end users, and that work is required in these domains, in addition to strong efforts in linking the validation and acceptance processes.

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