

August 24, 2004

Dr. Ting-Kai Li, Director
National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism
(NIAAA)
5635 Fishers Ln., MSC 9304
Bethesda, MD 20892-9304

2 pages via fax: 301-443-7043
(hard copy to follow)

Dear Dr. Li,

I hope you are open to receiving criticism of a university that receives millions in funding from your institute and others within the National Institutes of Health (NIH), as well as annual contributions from you and your wife. I write from personal experience that I doubt anyone with whom you are acquainted could match.

From October 15, 2001, until April 17, 2002, I cared for rats and mice used in experiments by the Bowles Center for Alcohol Studies (BCAS) at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (UNC). During my employment at UNC, I was also employed as an undercover investigator for People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA). Based on documentation from my investigation, NIH's Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare (OLAW) concurred that UNC committed multiple violations of federal guidelines for the humane care and use of animals in laboratories, including unauthorized experiments on animals by BCAS Associate Director Leslie Morrow's lab and unauthorized changes to protocol, such as the administration of nicotine injections to animals by BCAS Director Fulton Crews' lab. Despite the government's remote investigation, a follow-up investigation conducted by PETA from January to November 2003 revealed that UNC continues to violate the minimal standards of animal care set forth by the Public Health Service.

It is my personal experience involving studies on animals that—even if they are conducted strictly according to protocol and within the bounds of law—they stand no chance of benefiting humans suffering from alcoholism. I must implore your agency to allocate funds for programs that will help people, not harm animals.

On a daily basis, I observed and discussed experimental procedures with the principal investigators and their staffs. I was therefore in a reasonably good position to assess the quality of work being produced, even though I am a layperson. I documented a number of disturbing admissions by BCAS researchers, including the following:



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- Researcher Jon Holt from George Breese’s lab told me on January 10, 2002—on videotape—that the reason that the majority of researchers “put a disease staked to something they’re interested in is so it gets funding from the NIH,” and that binge-drinking studies conducted on rats by Crews’ lab are “crap,” “silly,” and “gratuitous.” Holt argued, “They’re looking at brain damage caused by alcoholism ... but don’t we know there is brain damage? So what, we protect against the brain damage so we can binge drink and kill our liver first instead of our brain? ... Let’s understand [alcoholism] in humans. Let’s just do the MRI scans and the PET scans and find out what the alcoholics are doing to their own brains.”
- Researcher Eric from Morrow’s lab admitted on November 26, 2001, that the research he was involved in was “bullshit” and “pointless” and that only one of three things can come from BCAS experiments on rats and mice: something that the researchers already know, something so minuscule that it does not warrant funding or animals’ lives, or something that is totally meaningless.

The most clear-cut example of the federally funded garbage that I witnessed being passed off as science was documented on videotape on January 15, 2002, when researcher Mary Beth Wilkie, from the labs of Crews and Morrow, explained to me the setup of an experiment she was conducting involving four groups of single-housed mice: One group of animals had running wheels and alcohol, another group had only alcohol, another group had only wheels, and a final group had neither wheels nor alcohol. Wilkie told me that she had conducted this study before but was doing so again in order “to satisfy all of these reviewers when [I] go to publish a paper” and that she had previously found that the brains of the mice who consumed alcohol and exercised on the wheels produced as many new neurons as did the brains of the mice who exercised but did not consume alcohol. I asked Wilkie if these results suggested that humans who drink excessively can maintain healthy brain function by exercising, and she laughed and stated, “But if you drink a whole lot, you don’t exercise! But that is the implication.”

Admitting that even she realized how inconsequential her experiment was to human health problems, Wilkie told me that in the article she planned to submit for publication, she would not claim that there was any connection between these drunken mice and human alcoholics, but that she would use such benign language as, “might, maybe, could be, perhaps.” She went on to inform me that “people [involved in alcohol research on animals] don’t draw a lot of conclusions. They give conjectures. ... There’s just too many variables. It’s much too complex just to say, ‘You can drink and exercise and be fine—it would be just the same as if you exercised and [drank] no alcohol.’ You can’t say that, even though it looks like that.”

I wholeheartedly agree with the NIAAA that alcoholism is a horrific disease that merits the attention of health-care professionals and funding agencies in this country. Some of my dearest loved ones have battled the disease of alcoholism,

and as a result of having witnessed their struggles, I feel strongly that the experiments conducted on animals by the BCAS and similar institutions make a mockery of this life-threatening disease. People suffering from this illness do not need a “cure” for their disease or a “remedy” to justify their continued use of harmful substances, they need greater access to recovery programs.

The examples of shoddy “science” that I witnessed during the six months that I worked in the lab are endless. I would be more than happy to speak with you further about my experiences or to provide you with any documentation that you may be interested in, such as video footage, photos, log notes, my correspondence with UNC administrators regarding animal-related concerns, and PETA’s two formal complaints to the NIH. Please feel free to contact me at 757-622-7382, extension 8036, by fax at 757-628-0781, or via e-mail at KateT@peta.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kate Turlington". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Kate Turlington, Investigations Liaison
Research & Investigations Department

cc: Joe Barton, Acting Chair of the Energy & Commerce Subcommittee
on Oversight &

Investigations, 202-225-3052 (fax)

Greg Walden, Vice Chair of the Energy & Commerce Subcommittee
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Investigations, 202-225-5774 (fax)