



PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS

March 25, 2020

Martha E. Pollack, Ph.D.
Office of the President
300 Day Hall
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14853

Via e-mail: president@cornell.edu

Dear President Pollack,

Thank you in advance for your time. I'm writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and our more than 6.5 million members and supporters worldwide regarding an urgent matter. In response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Cornell University (CU) is urging researchers who use rodents and fish to "identify all essential animal cages" and "all essential tanks," "not to exceed 60% of their census as of March 1, 2020"¹ – and likely soon thereafter start destroying animals who are considered not "essential" to the university's experiments.

Based on the repeated and documented CU violations of the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, and given the COVID-19 pandemic that is influencing the shut-down of animal experiments around the world,² we urge CU to immediately: 1) prohibit approval of new animal protocols and experiments; 2) prohibit breeding and acquisition of new animals for laboratories; 3) finalize and end ongoing animal experiments; and, 4) prove that all of these animals and experiments are concretely advancing human health, and if they're not then switch to superior human-relevant, animal-free research methods.³

Cornell University's Culture of Noncompliance: PHS Violations

According to public records obtained by PETA from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) via the Freedom of Information Act, CU has reported many violations to the PHS Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals. The following are a few of them: deviations from approved protocols; the death of at least 19 mice who were administered

¹ <https://research.weill.cornell.edu/node/6617>

² <https://www.statnews.com/2020/03/14/coronavirus-pandemic-forces-research-labs-shut-down/>

³ https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/The-Research-Modernization-Deal-Report-US_FINAL_2020_300.pdf

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doses of a contaminated vaccine; the administration of expired anesthesia, analgesia, and euthanasia drugs to more than 900 mice; and incomplete records of animal care.

COVID-19: Ending Animal Experiments Protects Animals, Staff, and Patients

CU is apparently implementing a contingency plan to “identify all essential animal cages” and “essential tanks,” and to “cease all invasive research procedures.” Also, CU “non-essential experiments” will not “be initiated if they will extend past Thursday, March 19th (MSK [Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center]) or Friday March 20th (WCM [Weill Cornell Medicine])”.⁴ This begs the question why taxpayer dollars are being used on experiments that can easily be ended or that involve animals who, apparently, are considered extraneous to the testing in the first place. Equally troubling is that the experiments themselves are not critical to advancing human health, since more than 90 percent of highly promising basic science discoveries (most of which involve animal experiments) do not enter routine clinical use in humans.⁵

We call on CU to publicly release the following information:

- 1) An itemization of all experimental protocols that will continue as part of CU’s “Contingency Plan Stage 3” plan (such that they may be categorized as critical, essential, necessary, and/or other similar terminology);
- 2) An itemization of all experimental protocols that will not continue as part of CU’s “Contingency Plan Stage 3” plan (such that they may be categorized as extraneous, non-critical, non-essential, ramped down, disposable, unnecessary and/or other similar terminology);
- 3) The number and species of animals who are in experimental protocols covered by item number 1 above (e.g., in an “essential” and/or other similar terminology category), and the number and species of animals who are in experimental protocols covered by item number 2 above (e.g., not in an “essential” and/or other similar terminology category); and,
- 4) The endpoint/disposition of animals used in experimental protocols covered by item number 2 above (e.g., not in an “essential” and/or similar terminology category), and notice of if, when, and how many of these animals have been and/or will be euthanized, culled, killed, destroyed, disposed or reduced in cage census.

⁴ <https://research.weill.cornell.edu/node/6617>

⁵ <https://www.bmj.com/content/348/bmj.g3387.long>

You can contact me directly by e-mail at ShalinG@peta.org or by telephone at 757-962-8325. We look forward to your swift reply to this quickly developing and urgent matter. Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Shalin G. Gala". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "S" that loops under the rest of the name.

Shalin G. Gala
Vice President, International Laboratory Methods
Laboratory Investigations Department