

PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS

March 31, 2020

Mark Richards
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Dear Provost Richards,

I am writing on behalf of our 6.5 million members and supporters to ask you to take immediate action to protect the health of thousands of monkeys and ensure that research integrity is maintained at the federally-funded Washington National Primate Research Center (WaNPRC) in Seattle. In a recent [media report](#), directors of three of the country's seven National Primate Research Centers stated that primate colonies were being closely monitored for COVID-19. One of the people quoted was Sally Thompson-Iritani, a mouse and rat researcher, who has recently been appointed Interim Director for WaNPRC.

Months before COVID-19 hit our nation, WaNPRC was in the midst of a financial and leadership crisis necessitating layoffs, hiring freezes, and drastic cost-cutting measures. We understand that the Executive Director for Health Science Administration, David Anderson, has been relieved of his supervisory duties of WaNPRC and that Dr Thompson-Iritani reports directly to you. These rapid changes in leadership and oversight are highly unusual and may be indicative of disarray. We are concerned that WaNPRC no longer has the resources or expertise to protect the health and wellbeing of the primates or those who are responsible for caring for them.

As you know, WaNPRC, funded in 2019 with more than \$13 million for basic operations by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and recipient of millions more in research grants, is responsible for maintaining the nation's largest specific pathogen free (SPF) colony of pig-tailed macaques. WaNPRC also conducts infectious disease research using several species of monkeys at its [facilities](#) on the University of Washington campus, within the Warren G. Magnuson Health Sciences Center, as well as at their Western facility in Seattle's Belltown neighborhood. WaNPRC's SPF breeding colony of pig-tailed macaques

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is located in Mesa, Arizona, on Tribal Land belonging to the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community. Publications by WaNPRC researchers and affiliates show that WaNPRC has struggled for years to identify and treat macaques exposed to pathogens transmitted from humans or the environment where they are being housed. WaNPRC's macaques, husbandry, veterinary, and administrative personnel routinely move between facilities.

Washington State saw the first cases of COVID-19, and King County had our nation's first death. The high mortality observed in a Seattle nursing home has highlighted that individuals in close-contact and with compromised immune systems are at increased risk of contracting and/or dying from COVID-19. The monkeys at WaNPRC are kept in very close quarters and all are either experimentally or naturally immune-compromised. While the virus manifests differently in monkeys than in humans, these animals are at risk.

The directors of the National Primate Research Centers have acknowledged that their colonies are at risk:

“Keeping the virus out of primate colonies across the country will be essential for SARS-CoV-2 research, [Jeffrey] Roberts and other center officials say. Once an animal has been infected, it can't be used for research, so any colony outbreak would severely limit the number of animals available for COVID-19 experiments.”

“If we wanted to test the efficacy of a vaccine and the animals have already been exposed [to the virus] and gotten over [an infection], you can't infect them, so you couldn't tell whether the vaccine's protective,” [Skip]Bohm says. “You couldn't do drug treatment studies to see if you could cure the disease because you couldn't infect [the animals].” [March 19, 2020 The Scientist](#)

Dr. Thompson-Iritani is quoted in the article: “...[T]he animals at the Washington site are fairly well protected from accidentally contracting SARS-CoV-2 from humans...”. This is not reassuring.

Furthermore, we are deeply concerned that in the face of a global pandemic—*the very reason that primate experimenters claim to need to cage and maintain 100,000-plus primates in laboratories*—WaNPRC may not be able to show that the macaques in their care haven't been exposed to COVID-19. As you likely know, animal “models” overwhelmingly fail

to lead to treatments for humans. The NIH reports that 95 percent of new medications that test safe and effective in animals fail in clinical trials.ⁱ It's also been shown that 90 percent of basic research, most of which involves animals, fails to lead to human therapies,ⁱⁱ and as many as 89 percent of preclinical studies, many of which involve animals, could not be reproduced,ⁱⁱⁱ a fundamental step used to confirm the validity of scientific results. Monkeys who may or may not be harboring various viruses, including COVID-19, will not yield reliable data. We respectfully request that you immediately provide PETA and the public with the following information:

- a. documentation that no WaNPRC staff have been exposed to or infected with COVID-19;
- b. documentation that no WaNPRC primates have been exposed to or infected with COVID-19;
- c. documentation that simply limiting staff exposure to primates will protect the animals from exposure to COVID-19.

We further ask that all current experiments on primates be suspended until and unless, at a minimum, WaNPRC can demonstrate that no monkeys have been exposed to or infected with COVID-19. While these steps must be taken at all primate laboratories and colonies in the U.S., it is critical for WaNPRC, given its location at the epicenter, and apparent issues with leadership, to take action immediately.

PETA scientists and veterinarians advise both government agencies and private corporations on issues involving research using animals in laboratories. We would be happy to meet with you, on short notice, on this issue. May we hear from you?

Thank you.

Sincerely,

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ⁱ National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences. Transforming Translational Science.

<https://ncats.nih.gov/files/NCATS-factsheet.pdf>. Published Winter 2019. Accessed March 24, 2020.

ⁱⁱ Contopoulos-Ioannidis DG, Ntzani EE, Ioannidis JPA. Translation of highly promising basic science research into clinical applications. *The American Journal of Medicine*. 2003;114:477-84.

ⁱⁱⁱ Freedman LP, Cockburn IM, Simcoe TS. The economics of reproducibility in preclinical research. *PLoS Biology*. 2015;13(6):e1002165.