



PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS

April 8, 2020

Patrick Gallagher, Ph.D.
Office of the Chancellor
c/o Alison Wateska
Executive Assistant for Chancellor
University of Pittsburgh
4200 Fifth Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15260

Via e-mail: alw122@pitt.edu

Dear Chancellor Gallagher,

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. Based on the repeated and documented failure of the University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) to meet the provisions 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,¹ we urge Pitt 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.²

Pitt's Culture of Noncompliance: Violations to the PHS Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals

According to public records obtained by PETA from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) via the Freedom of Information Act, Pitt has reported many violations to the PHS Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals. The following are a few of them: mice were subjected to unapproved procedures involving injections of an unapproved virus strain into their brains; a marmoset broke his/her jaw with a damaged hammock; 10 rats died of hypoxia when an experimenter failed to report a low-oxygen alarm; one primate was strangulated and another was injured when both animals became entangled in their chain collars; mice were found unattended and

¹ <https://www.statnews.com/2020/03/14/coronavirus-pandemic-forces-research-labs-shut-down/>

² https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/The-Research-Modernization-Deal-Report-US_FINAL_2020_300.pdf

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anesthetized after being subjected to corneal wounding procedures; mice were left without access to water; in many occasions, alive mouse pups were discarded along with dead mice when staff failed to follow euthanasia procedures; and several mice exceeded humane endpoints, and did not receive any pain relief after an experimenter failed to adhere to the approved protocol.

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

As part of its COVID-19 contingency plan, Pitts urged its experimenters to “[i]dentify all non-essential research-related activities that can be delayed, ramped down, curtailed, or suspended ... and begin the process to do so.”³ In response to Pitt’s COVID-19 contingency plan, at least one Pitt employee has “reduced the [mouse] colonies by about 80 cages, which might each have a handful of mice, and still expects to make further reductions of the 300–400 cages she typically oversees.”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 Pitt to publicly release the following information:

- 1) An itemization of all experimental protocols that will continue as part of Pitt’s COVID-19 response 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 Pitt’s COVID-19 response 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 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 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.

You can contact me 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.

³ <https://www.svcresearch.pitt.edu/covid-19-reduction-research-operations>

⁴ <https://www.the-scientist.com/news-opinion/animal-facilities-make-tough-decisions-as-pandemic-closes-labs-67339>

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

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