

Robert Meadowcroft
Chief Executive
Muscular Dystrophy UK

30 October 2017

Dear Mr Meadowcroft,

Thank you for the passion you have displayed in searching for a cure for muscular dystrophy (MD). I am writing as someone living with MD and as a former advocacy ambassador with Muscular Dystrophy UK to express my personal gratitude to you for your work in developing ways to improve the lives of individuals suffering from this disease. I know you are as disheartened as I am that after many decades of research, there is still no cure or viable treatment for MD. It's for this reason that I thought I would write to you to suggest that we should think about current MD research a bit differently.

Specifically, I'm concerned about the charity's involvement and collaboration with canine MD experimenters. Canine MD may look like human MD, but as you know, it's not the same disease. The incidence of fatal diaphragm failure in newborns, the age at the onset of symptoms, growth retardation, loss of ambulation, neurocognitive deficits, and life expectancy all differ between cases of canine and human MD. Animals (including dogs) have been used for at least six decades without resulting in any useful MD treatments, let alone a cure.

As you may know, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) obtained disturbing [video footage](#) documenting the situation of dogs from Joe Kornegay's golden retriever muscular dystrophy (GRMD) colony at Texas A&M University. In addition, a French student secured [video footage](#) of the MD dog laboratory at Alfort National Veterinary School. The videos show shockingly thin dogs housed – frequently alone – in barren metal kennel cages. The dogs struggle to walk and are unable to eat normally. Long ropes of drool hang from the mouths of ones whose jaw muscles have weakened. Because of the disease, their tongues are swollen, and one dog can be seen struggling to consume the gruel – apparently, the only type of food he can ingest.

According to John J Pippin, MD, FACC, animal experiments such as these have only rare and random clinical relevance for human diseases, and there is no reason to believe that experiments on dogs will benefit humans with MD. However, MD UK continues to fund experimenters such as Kornegay's colleague Richard Piercy, who also uses dogs in cruel and apparently useless procedures.

Considering the futility of canine MD experiments, the ethical concerns are obvious. I'm referring not only to the suffering and deaths of the dogs but also to the faith that MD patients and their families have that the best and most promising tools will be used to find a cure. This is why I encourage you to devote MD UK's financial and intellectual resources to more productive, human-relevant methods for studying and curing the disease.

As someone living with MD, I urge you to stop funding failed experiments that hurt animals and don't help humans. I appeal to you, Mr Meadowcroft, to do what you can to end the suffering of these dogs and invest in human-relevant research methods that will actually help people like me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Johnathon Byrne'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the beginning.

Johnathon Byrne