



August 15, 2022

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Via e-mail: nina.schor@nih.gov

Dear Dr. Schor:

I hope this correspondence, written on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), finds you well. Congratulations on your appointment as acting deputy director for intramural research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). I recognize that this new position brings with it an extensive set of responsibilities. While you serve in this role, I hope you'll take the opportunity to address ongoing systemic and egregious violations of animal welfare guidelines in NIH's intramural laboratories.

Case reports filed by NIH's Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare (OLAW) from January 5, 2018, to November 23, 2021, document *no fewer than 120 violations of federal animal welfare guidelines*. As you know, the guidelines represent *minimum* animal welfare standards, and in NIH's laboratories, failure to comply with the guidelines has resulted in excruciating pain and unrelenting misery for the animals imprisoned there. Animals died of starvation and thirst after workers failed to provide them with food or water. Experimenters used animals in invasive surgeries that caused pain but failed to provide them with pain relief as stipulated in the protocol—sometimes, failing to provide *any* pain relief. Some experimenters went rogue and carried out procedures that had not been approved by the Animal Care and Use Committee (ACUC). Other experimenters failed to comply with the humane endpoints specified in the ACUC-approved protocol, meaning that animals experienced pain and distress beyond what was permitted.

On February 7, 2020, December 7, 2021, and March 3, 2022, PETA wrote to your predecessor, Dr. Michael Gottesman, to ask that “a thorough audit of the policies and processes employed in NIH's experimental use of animals” be conducted and that NIH implement “a zero-tolerance policy for experimenters who fail to comply with approved protocols and directives from veterinary staff—as well as a zero-tolerance policy for animal husbandry staff who fail to provide animals with basic necessities such as food, water, and safe shelter.” We pointed out that as a federal agency, NIH is fully funded through U.S. tax dollars—receiving \$43 billion in fiscal year 2021—and that the failure on the part of its experimentation program to comply with minimum animal welfare laws and guidelines “undermines crucial public faith in the agency and public trust in the system of oversight of NIH laboratories that use animals.”

In our letters, we cautioned that failure to address the ongoing, clearly systemic issues in NIH's laboratories would ensure continued problems. Indeed, the most recent case reports obtained by PETA document that problems persist in the

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laboratories—and for animals, the horror show remains. In case reports filed by OLAW from January 4, 2022, to May 19, 2022, there were *no fewer than 17 animal welfare violations* in NIH’s laboratories:

1. **January 4 (Case 16B):** A mouse died of dehydration after three cages confining mice weren’t equipped with water bottles. Presumably, the other mice in these cages suffered as well from the lack of water.
2. **January 4 (Case 16C):** A rabbit slated to be euthanized was given ketamine by a technician who then became distracted and left the room. By the time the technician returned, the rabbit was dead.
3. **January 4 (Case 16D):** A laboratory member administered a drug that wasn’t listed in the approved protocol to a cohort of mice. According to the report, “Some mice given this drug died” and “[i]n total 10 mice were affected.”
4. **January 27 (Case 16E):** Twenty-two mice experienced weight loss that exceeded the humane endpoint approved in the protocol. Two died, and one was moribund.
5. **January 27 (Case 16F):** Rats used in an experimental surgery were observed to be bloated. Upon investigation, it was determined that laboratory personnel had used a drug called Equithesin to anesthetize the rats rather than pentobarbital, the approved substance. Laboratory personnel lied when asked which anesthetic had been used—and later admitted that they weren’t aware of the differences between the two drugs. In fact, Equithesin had been used in two different projects as a surgical anesthetic in rats, and both times, the animals exhibited gastric distress. It was reported as early as 1977 that chloral hydrate—one of the compounds in Equithesin—can cause gastric distress in rats, including symptoms such as a swollen abdomen, lethargy, and anorexia.
6. **April 11 (Case 16G):** Three mice were administered lipopolysaccharide (bacterial toxins) “at a dose that was about ten times the dose” in the approved protocol. Two of the mice “were ill,” and the third was moribund. All three were euthanized.
7. **April 21 (Case 16H):** Five recently weaned mice died of starvation after staff failed to place food in a hopper. The missing food wasn’t noted during the twice-daily health checks that occurred from the time the error was made to the time the dead mice were discovered.
8. **April 22 (Case 16I):** Experimenters intravenously injected six mice with a suspension of tumor cells, and one of the animals died. The protocol had specified subcutaneous injection of tumor cells.
9. **April 20 (Case 16J):** Experimenters failed to euthanize an animal (the species isn’t indicated, although it appears that the animal was either a mouse or a rat) when the humane endpoint was reached. The animal wasn’t euthanized until the following day—meaning the animal’s pain and distress were extended beyond what was permitted in the approved protocol.
10. **April 22 (Case 16K):** Experimenters failed to ensure safe caging for infant guinea pigs. A 10-day-old guinea pig pup was injured by a vertical metal grate at the back of a cage when one of the pup’s hind legs became caught in a gap in the caging—causing an injury so severe that the animal had to be euthanized.
11. **April 22 (Case 16L):** Laboratory staff failed to assemble a cage and food hopper correctly—and the seven chickens confined to the cage were left without access to food. Two chickens died of starvation, and the remaining five were in a lethargic state. Two of these five birds were euthanized.
12. **May 5 (Case 16M):** Fifteen mice died after experimenters failed to restrain them properly for an experimental procedure that involved exposure to radiation.
13. **May 5 (Case 16N):** Eight mice who had undergone intracranial injections had not received the required analgesic and had been kept past the experimental endpoint. They were supposed to be

euthanized within 48 hours after surgery but were still alive one to three weeks later. Also, the surgeon had not been approved to perform procedures on the protocol and had known that the procedure wasn't approved. He admitted to performing 38 such surgeries from November 2021 to March 2022 and confirmed that he didn't use a postoperative analgesic for any of the animals undergoing surgery from some point between January 2022 and March 2022. The violations occurred for many weeks and remained unchecked because of poor communication, faulty recordkeeping, and apparent efforts by the surgeon to hide any evidence of his activities.

14. **May 16 (Case 16O):** An experimenter performed abdominal surgery on two adult mice—although the abdominal site had not been approved in the protocol.
15. **May 19 (Case 16P):** Mice in three cages were subjected to tail biopsies, even though this procedure had not been included in the approved protocol. In noncompliance with institutional guidelines, the mice were older than 21 days of age when the ends of their tails were amputated—and the animals would certainly have felt considerable pain, given that their tail vertebrae would have been ossified. Additionally, more than 2 millimeters of tail was collected for the biopsy, inadequate analgesics were used, and inadequate hemostasis and monitoring occurred following the amputation. The report acknowledged that the mice subjected to this procedure “likely experienced unrelieved pain.”
16. **May 19 (Case 16Q):** Mice in 11 cages were subjected to orthotopic pancreatic cell transplant—a major survival surgery. However, the experimenters did not administer the approved analgesics. Also, the staff failed to record any postsurgical observations. The report stated, “These deviations from the approved ACUC protocol meant that mice underwent surgery without the approved analgesic regime and likely experienced unrelieved post-surgical pain.”
17. **May 19 (Case 16R):** Mice in three cages were noted to have hunched postures, unsteady gaits, generalized dermatitis, and rough hair coats and were beyond the endpoints specified in the protocol. Also, three of the mice had been reinjected with a cell line, a procedure that wasn't approved by the ACUC.

Let me be clear, Dr. Schor: I'm not asking that the 17 incidents listed here be investigated—that has already been done. I'm asking that in light of these 17 incidents and the preceding 120 incidents—all representing failures of NIH experimenters and laboratory staff to do the absolute minimum to ensure some modicum of basic welfare for animals imprisoned in the agency's laboratories—*meaningful* action be taken by your office to address what is an indelible stain on NIH's reputation.

It should be abundantly clear that the feeble assurances of strengthened training, updated SOPs, enhanced ACUC oversight, discussions with staff, and experimenters' apologies specified in the case reports have been entirely insufficient to address the wholesale failures in NIH's laboratories.

May we meet to discuss these concerns?

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Alka Chandna, Ph.D.
Vice President
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