



October 11, 2023

Christopher Tash
Captain
Princeton Police Department

Via e-mail: ctash@princetonnj.gov

Re: Request to Investigate Princeton University for Apparent Violations of New Jersey’s Cruelty-to-Animals Laws

Dear Captain Tash:

I’m writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals—PETA entities have more than 9 million members and supporters globally, over 165,000 of whom live in New Jersey—to request that your office investigate and pursue enforcement action against Princeton University, which conducts experiments on live animals, for its apparent violations of New Jersey’s prohibitions against cruelty to animals. Evidence indicates that Princeton failed to provide a rhesus macaque with necessary veterinary care, thus causing the monkey to suffer bodily injury and die, in apparent violation of N.J. Stat. § 4:22-17.

PETA obtained a March 23, 2023, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal Welfare Complaint¹ for Princeton documenting that, according to the complainant, Princeton veterinarians “knowingly” had left a 2-centimeter (about the diameter of a nickel) piece of ceramic screw inside a rhesus macaque’s head for eight months. On June 13, 2019, he self-explanted the cranial implant that had been placed in his skull by experimenters at a prior time. He was then taken to surgery. The complaint doesn’t specify whether the surgery was just to clean the area where he had removed the implant or to replace the implant. Eight months later, in February 2020, veterinary staff performed exploratory surgery on the monkey after a course of antibiotics and a structural MRI showed an abscess. During the surgery, veterinary staff discovered the 2-centimeter piece of screw in the temporalis muscle on the side of his head. He then died of complications related to the surgery.

¹The Animal Welfare Complaint is attached. Such a complaint is an administrative-investigation report generated after the agency receives allegations of a federal Animal Welfare Act (AWA) violation and does not reflect a criminal investigation. Additionally, the AWA does not insulate Princeton from liability under state law because it expressly does not preempt the field. 7 U.S.C. §§ 2143(a)(8), 2145(b); see also USDA OIG, CONTROLS OVER APHIS LICENSING OF ANIMAL EXHIBITORS, AUDIT REP. 33601-10-Ch, at 4 (June 2010), https://www.rexano.org/RegAgency/OIG_Audit_USDA_Exhibitors2010.pdf (stating that “[t]he AWA does not supersede State and local authorities or restrict them in any way when their laws are more stringent than the AWA”). Moreover, the enforcement of state law for the protection of animals is crucial given that the AWA provides only minimal protections—and even those have been routinely found by the USDA’s own internal watchdog to be inadequately enforced, and Princeton’s conduct appears to fall within the prohibitions of New Jersey’s laws.

PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS

Washington
1536 16th St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
202-483-PETA

Los Angeles
2154 W. Sunset Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90026
323-644-PETA

Norfolk
501 Front St.
Norfolk, VA 23510
757-622-PETA

Info@peta.org
PETA.org

Entities:

- PETA Asia
- PETA India
- PETA France
- PETA Australia
- PETA Germany
- PETA Switzerland
- PETA Netherlands
- PETA Foundation (U.K.)

New Jersey law states, “It shall be unlawful to purposely, knowingly, or recklessly ... [c]ause bodily injury to a living animal or creature by failing to provide the living animal or creature with necessary care, whether as the owner or as a person otherwise charged with the care of the living animal or creature.” N.J. Stat. § 4:22-17(c)(2). The statute also provides for an increased penalty if “the animal or creature dies as a result of the violation [or] the animal or creature suffers serious bodily injury as a result of the violation.” *Id.* § 4:22-17(d)(1)(a)(b).

In this situation, Princeton’s veterinary staff—as well as the institutional oversight entities (Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee, attending veterinarian, and institutional official) responsible for animals and their care in Princeton’s facilities—apparently did purposely, knowingly, or recklessly cause bodily injury and death to the monkey by failing to provide him with necessary “veterinary care to alleviate suffering and maintain health.”² This failure occurred both at the stage of not properly removing the 2-centimeter screw from the monkey’s head during the surgery in June 2019 and during the subsequent eight months in which the screw remained in his head, apparently without proper diagnosis of or care for the issue. Throughout this time leading up to his death, he would have been experiencing physical pain and impairment.³

A brain abscess (a pus-filled pocket of infected material) can lead to brain swelling, reduction of blood flow to surrounding areas, permanent brain damage and associated symptoms, and, if left untreated, death. Common symptoms associated with brain abscesses include persistent headaches, fever, altered mental status, nausea and vomiting, and hemiplegia (weakness on one side of the body).⁴ Seizures, visual difficulties, poor balance, and cognitive problems are also common symptoms associated with brain abscesses.⁵ In nonhuman primates, brain abscesses have been associated with decreased appetite, fever, vomiting, lethargy, ataxia, disorientation, seizures, and visual impairments (including blindness).⁶

Even after surgical and antibiotic treatment, many human and nonhuman animals experience additional discomfort and symptoms from brain abscesses. In response to the infection, the immune response

²See N.J. Stat. § 4:22-15.

³See *id.*

⁴Mathisen GE, Johnson JP. Brain abscess. *Clin. Infect. Dis.* 1997;25(4):763–781; Carpenter J, Stapleton S, Holliman R. Retrospective analysis of 49 cases of brain abscess and review of the literature. *Eur. J. Clin. Microbiol. Infect. Dis.* 2007;26(1):1–11; Felsenstein S, Williams B, Shingadia D, et al. Clinical and microbiologic features guiding treatment recommendations for brain abscesses in children. *Pediatr. Infect. Dis. J.* 2013;32(2):129–135; Kao PT, Tseng HK, Liu CP, et al. Brain abscess: clinical analysis of 53 cases. *J. Microbiol. Immunol. Infect.* 2003;36(2):129–136; Huang J, Wu H, Huang H, et al. Clinical characteristics and outcome of primary brain abscess: a retrospective analysis. *BMC Infect. Dis.* 2021;21(1):1245; Su J, Hu B, Zhang Y, Li Y. Clinical and radiological characteristics of brain abscess due to different organisms in hospitalized patients: A 6-year retrospective study from China. *Heliyon.* 2023;9(5):e16003; Kanu OO, Ojo O, Esezobor C, et al. Pediatric brain abscess—etiology, management challenges and outcome in Lagos Nigeria. *Surg. Neurol. Int.* 2021;12:592.

⁵Corsini Campioli C, Castillo Almeida NE, O’Horo JC, et al. Bacterial brain abscess: an outline for diagnosis and management. *Am. J. Med.* 2021;134(10):1210–1217.e2; Moorthy RK, Rajshekhar V. Management of brain abscess: an overview. *Neurosurg. Focus.* 2008;24(6):E3; Wu S, Wei Y, Yu X, et al. Retrospective analysis of brain abscess in 183 patients: a 10-year survey. *Medicine (Baltimore).* 2019;98(46):e17670.

⁶Villano JS, Ogden B, Goh A, et al. Cerebellar abscess in a cynomolgus macaque (*Macaca fascicularis*). *J. Med. Primatol.* 2008;37 Suppl. 1:82–87. doi:10.1111/j.1600-0684.2007.00254.x; Ferrecchia CE, Ducore RM, Colgin LM, Lewis AD. Spontaneous nocardial brain abscess in a juvenile rhesus macaque (*Macaca mulatta*). *J. Med. Primatol.* 2015;44(1):45–48; Leblanc M, Berry K, McCort H, Reuter JD. Brain abscess in a rhesus macaque (*Macaca mulatta*) with a cephalic implant. *Comp. Med.* 2013;63(4):367–372; Doane CJ, Zimmerman PE, Putnam PT, et al. Silicon foreign body in the cerebrum of a rhesus macaque (*Macaca mulatta*). *Comp. Med.* 2018;68(2):182–186.

elicited can destroy the surrounding normal brain tissue, resulting in lesions that can encompass a large portion of brain tissue and spread well beyond the initial focus of infection, leading to irreversible neurological complications.⁷

Princeton's conduct is not exempt from prosecution, as it in no way constitutes a "*properly* conducted scientific *experiment*" [*emphasis added*].⁸ First, it's unclear whether the act of leaving a ceramic screw inside the monkey's head for eight months occurred during *any* experiment. Second, even if it did occur during an experiment, Princeton's conduct was not "properly conducted" under any standard, including federal policies applying to research facilities.⁹

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions at AmandaSc@peta.org. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Amanda Schemkes, J.D., M.S.
Laboratory Oversight Specialist
Laboratory Investigations Department
PETA

cc: Angelo J. Onofri, Esq., Mercer County Prosecutor's Office (aonofri@mercercounty.org)
Kenneth Strother Jr., Assistant Vice President, Princeton Department of Public Safety
(kstrother@princeton.edu)

⁷Jansson AK, Enblad P, Sjölin J. Efficacy and safety of cefotaxime in combination with metronidazole for empirical treatment of brain abscess in clinical practice: a retrospective study of 66 consecutive cases. *Eur. J. Clin. Microbiol. Infect. Dis.* 2004;23(1):7–14. doi:10.1007/s10096-003-1055-7; Kielian T. Immunopathogenesis of brain abscess. *J. Neuroinflammation.* 2004;1(1):16; Alvis Miranda H, Castellar-Leones SM, Elzain MA, Moscote-Salazar LR (2013). Brain abscess: current management. *JNRP* 2013;4(Suppl 1), S67–S81.

⁸See N.J. Stat. § 4:22-16(a).

⁹This incident involves serious deviations from the veterinary care requirements of the Public Health Service Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals and the *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals*, which apply to federally funded experimentation on animals and require compliance with state and local laws.



USDA-APHIS-Animal Care



ANIMAL WELFARE COMPLAINT		
Complaint No. AC23-0405	Date Entered: March 23, 2023	Processed By: Samantha Jones
Referred To: Tonya Hadjis		Reply Due: May 7, 2023
Facility or Person Complaint Filed Against		
Name: PRINCETON UNIVERSITY	Customer No.: 176	License No.:
Address: P O BOX 36		Email Address:
City: PRINCETON	State: NJ	Phone No.:
Complainant Information		
Name: Anonymous	Organization:	
Address:		Email Address:
City:	State:	Phone No.:
How was the Complaint received? Email		
Details of Complaint: See attached		
Results: A focused inspection was conducted by Jessica Gowins and Gloria McFadden on April 20, 2023. The complainant alleged that the vets knowingly left hardware in a NHP during an explant surgery. This resulted in a foreign body abscess reaction that was treated for more than 8 months. The NPH underwent exploratory surgery to remove the hardware and died of complications related to the surgery and anesthesia. USDA officials reviewed surgical and clinical records for the non-human primates (NHPs) at the facility. It was determined that there was a rhesus macaque that self-explanted his cranial implant on 06/13/2019. The macaque was immediately reviewed by veterinary staff and then taken to surgery. According to surgical records pre-operative medications included: sedatives, anti-emetics, and pain medications. Anesthesia was performed by the LAR veterinary technician anesthesiologist. The anesthesia logs document was complete and the parameters in the protocol were monitored. The veterinary staff performed x-rays and aerobic and anaerobic cultures of the explant site after surgery. According to records, a treatment plan was established by the LAR veterinary staff and followed by the laboratory staff and veterinary technicians. Records indicated that explant site was monitored daily, and any sign of infection was reported to the veterinarians. Cultures were performed and treatment plans, which included antibiotics, would be changed according to the results. Cleanings of the explant site were documented as well as any surgical interventions. In February 2020, the LAR vets decided to perform an exploratory surgery after a course of antibiotics and a structural MRI showed an abscess. A 2cm piece of ceramic screw was found and removed from the temporalis muscle. A treatment plan was established by the LAR veterinarians and followed by the clinical veterinarians and veterinary technicians.		



USDA-APHIS-Animal Care



The complainant alleged that the vets failed to adequately monitor the depth of anesthesia as recommended by an outside anesthesia expert and the IACUC. According to the complainant the vets failed to identify prolonged and severe hypotension during anesthesia. According to the IACUC approved protocols, anesthesia is performed by the LAR veterinary trained technicians. USDA officials reviewed the anesthesia logs of nonhuman primates that had cranial implant or explant surgeries at the facility. The records were complete and captured the monitoring parameters as defined in the protocol. Records reviewed did not show prolonged and severe hypotension during anesthesia. The complainant alleged that the vets failed to remain current with established veterinary practices including. They did not perform routine bloodwork and urinalysis pre-operatively as described in their SOPs. USDA officials reviewed medical records of non-human primates that underwent surgery. According to the IACUC approved protocols and SOPs, the LAR veterinarian must pre-approve the surgical procedure. A physical exam is performed 14 days before surgery. A diagnostic work-up that includes clinical pathology and urinalysis were performed. The medical records reviewed matched the requirements in the SOPs and protocols.

The complainant alleged that the veterinarians failed to remain current on the pre-operative use of analgesics. According to the complainant the vets used meloxicam that predisposed a NPH to acute renal failure. Meloxicam is approved for use in the IACUC approved protocol.

The complaint alleged that the veterinarians failed proper monitoring and identification of an appropriate surgical plan of anesthesia. According to the complainant the veterinarian failed to monitor blood pressure, respiratory function and blood gasses as recommended by the outside anesthesia expert and the IACUC for long surgical procedures. USDA officials reviewed the anesthesia logs of nonhuman primates that had cranial implant or explant surgeries at the facility. The records were complete and captured the monitoring parameters as defined in the protocol. The anesthesia logs document was complete and the monitoring parameters of were captured as defined in the protocol.

The complainant alleged that the vets failed to fully disclose many of these issues (severe and prolong hypotension and other lab results) to the pathologist at the time of tissue submission. This omission did not allow the pathologist to properly account for factors in determining cause of death. USDA official reviewed the necropsy reports of non-human primates at the facility. Each report had a history of the animal that matched the medical record of the non-human primate. IACUC approved tissues or organs that were requested by the lab were identified by the veterinary staff to the pathologist.

According to the complainant an outside panel was brought in by the University to review the NHP research program which concluded that the veterinarians had not kept current with the advanced neurosurgical models in use at Princeton University. According to the IACUC representative, the IACUC contacted three outside veterinarians after the IACUC investigation into the model. After the investigation, the University decided to hire a non-human primate veterinarian who is solely responsible for the animals.

The complainant alleged the veterinarians allowed a solution that was not a sterilant to be used to sterilize electrodes that are placed into the brain during experimentation. According to records and laboratory staff, electrodes were sanitized in accordance with the IACUC approved protocol.

The complainant alleged that the veterinarians failed to treat cylinder infections in a number of cases. According to medical records any signs of infection was documented, reported, and treated by the veterinary staff. Cultures were taken and treatment plans were adjusted depending on the results. Animal Care will continue to inspect this facility to ensure that past non-compliances are corrected and that AWA-regulated animals are protected to the fullest extent of Federal law.

Application Kit Provided:

Yes: No:

Inspector:
JESSICA GOWINS

Date:
April 27, 2023



USDA-APHIS-Animal Care



Reviewed By: Jeffrey Shepherd	Date: May 3, 2023
----------------------------------	----------------------