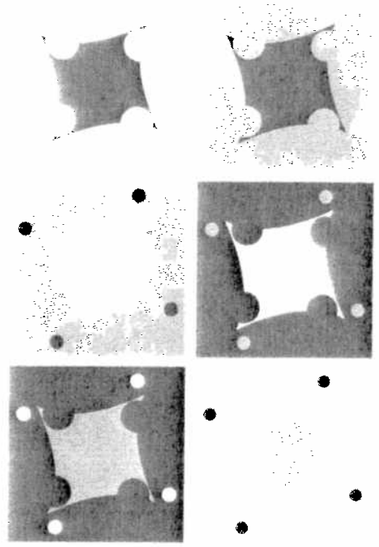

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Proceedings of A Joint FELASA/Scand-LAS Symposium 2010

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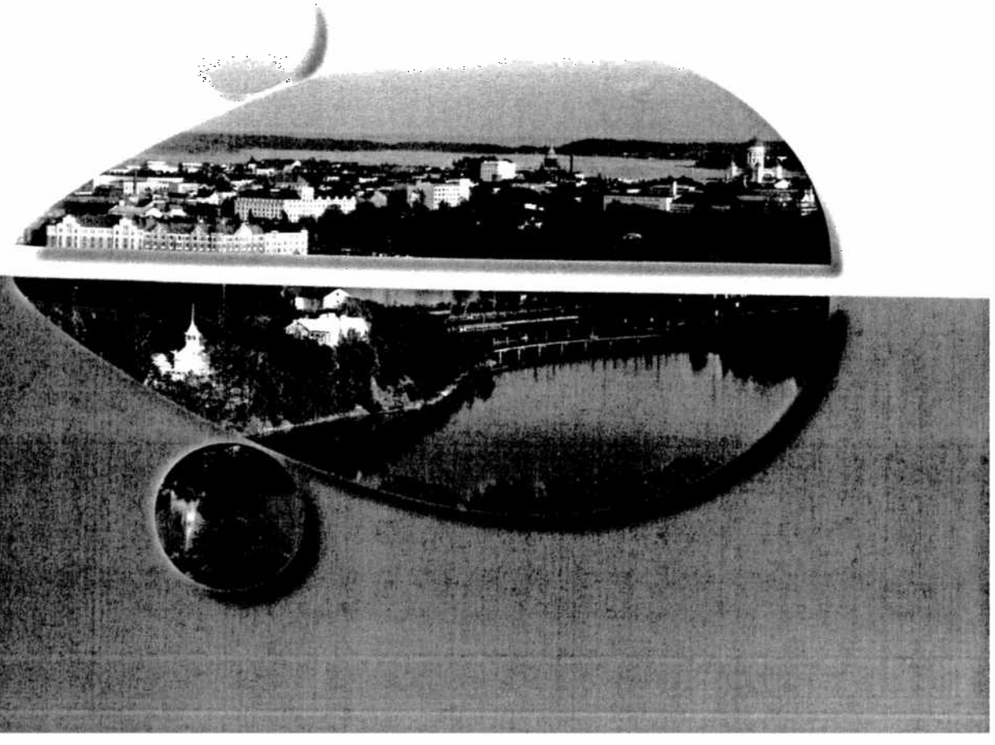

Workshop: Communication to the public about developments in animal research

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Introduction

Is the public aware of the fact that animal experiments are being performed and for what reasons; that alternatives (3Rs methods: Replacement, Reduction and Refinement alternatives) are being developed to reduce animal experiments and to improve science; that scientists also care about animal wellbeing; that animal experiments are in fact a part of day-to-day life and that the results are used for the wellbeing of the public? Where would the public get the information? Can the public develop a well-informed and balanced opinion about animal experiments? These are questions that many scientists, involved in animal experiments, worry about.

Notably, publicly available information on animal experiments often is negatively biased and out of context with reality. This is mainly due to the fact that people dealing with animal experimentation do not see it as their primary duty to communicate with the public. Who should be responsible for communicating facts on animal experimentation? Patient organisations generally decide that their patients should not be burdened about animal experiments, and in particular the suffering involved, that are the bases of their medical treatments. Consumer organisations are often more interested in price and quality than in the fact whether or not animal experiments were involved in the products they test and review. *Non-governmental organizations* (NGOs) do provide information on animal experiments, but this information often is doubted to be correct and balanced. Scientist and research organisations seem reluctant to inform the public about animal experiments.

From several studies, it could be concluded that, generally, the public becomes aware of animal experiments at the very moment they are interviewed about this topic or watch an item on TV[1]. Being confronted with the topic, most people then acknowledge that they have insufficient information to form an opinion; 42.5% don't have enough information on animal experimentation and how animals are treated; 76.6% find that there should be more transparency and public participation in determining when and how animals are used in experiments; 70.8 % believe that scientists and industry using animals do not currently provide sufficient information. These are results from a broad public consultation on animal experiments that the European Commission performed in 2006[2].

Notably, it seems that the designers and/or performers of the experiments are not very active in providing the public with information on animal experiments, and, moreover, the public is not aware of the attempts being made. For that reason, a workshop was organised during FELASA 2010, to discuss communication to the public about animal experiments and the 3Rs activities to reduce these. Three panel members, Kirsty Reid, Ann-Christine Eklöf and Jan-Bas Prins, were invited to give their views on how and what to communicate to the public.

Below you will find a summary of their considerations. These are followed by the summary of the subsequent discussions that evolved among the participants of the workshop and the panel. The discussion was chaired by Jan van der Valk and recorded by Frauke Ohl.

The discussions had to be cut short because of time constraints. However, one of the conclusions was that the lively discussion and the topics raised demonstrated the necessity to organise a follow-up. This report is meant as an initiation for the next part of this discussion perhaps already during the 8th World Congress on Alternatives and Animal Use in the Life Sciences in 2011, Montreal, Canada.

Animal welfare - NGO position (Kirsty Reid)

Use of animals in research and public concern

At Eurogroup for Animals, we believe there are serious ethical dilemmas associated with using sentient animals in procedures likely to cause them pain, suffering or distress. The fact that currently animal experiments are considered necessary to scientific research and safety testing does not diminish this fact. A paradigm shift is needed - a change in mindset away from '*how to continue to justify animal use*' to '*how can we ensure we replace animals as soon as possible*'?

Studies show that animal research is a serious concern for European citizens who believe far more needs to be done to protect animals and their welfare. Public opinion is important, as much research is funded directly or indirectly with the public's money and therefore they should have information that allows them to make well-informed judgements. A high percentage considers that they do not have enough information – e.g. Eurobarometer[3].

Communication is key

Openness and transparency are vitally important. Dialogue amongst stakeholders with two-way communication is essential. Constructive debate on 3Rs and animal use can only be accomplished when there is respect and commitment amongst stakeholders and where information provided needs to be accurate and honest.

Eurogroup believes that there is a need for greater openness and honesty about the true impact of scientific use on animals and about all the different purposes for which animals are used. In order to make progress, with both animal welfare and dialogue, we need to separate the rhetoric of debate from the actual facts and real concerns. Stakeholders involved may hold different perspectives:

The scientific community readily talks about the 'benefits' of animal use, but is much less forthcoming about the 'harm' to animals. Some scientists are themselves critical of the real benefits of some uses (by other scientists!), but this does not come across in information to the public. We hear about 'suffering being kept to a minimum', but a glance at the scientific literature or regulatory test guidelines shows that this does not prevent experimental animals from experiencing serious harm. We also hear about 'strict regulation' and 'high standards', yet under the current Directive 86/609/EEC, many Member States lack any proper system of authorisation of animal use or of ethical review. We hear how 'good husbandry and care' is, yet, although it is agreed current standards need upgrading for welfare (and scientific) reasons, pressure means the revised directive allows a 7 year delay before this needs to be done. Perspectives differ, where the definition of 'high standards' depends on your perspective: one person's high is another person's basic minimum!

There is a number of positive examples in the EU where stakeholders are working together to improve animal welfare and 3Rs, which merit good promotion to the public. These initiatives include EU legislation and dossiers where 3Rs are incorporated: the new animal experimentation directive; the European Action Plan on the Welfare and Protection of animals; the Sixth Community Environment Action Program and EU Framework Programs. Other EU Initiatives are the European Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods (ECVAM); the European Partnership for Alternative Approaches to Animal Testing (EPAA); the European consensus-platform for alternatives (ECOPA); and transatlantic agreements (CAAT-EU) and initiatives.

Effective communication plays a vital part in: ensuring that new legislation reflects the high level of public concern about the use of animals in experiments and applying the treaty which obligates the EU to fully respect the welfare of animals in its research policy; achieving significant increase in funding and resources to speed up the development, validation and acceptance of alternative testing strategies, in particular non-animal testing methods; developing a coherent and comprehensive strategy to phase out animal testing; achieving constructive debate and cooperation involving all stakeholders; and accomplishing improved International co-operation.

Good and open communication between scientist and public is necessary for mutual respect (Ann-Christine Eklöf)

Experimental research is very important to acquire basic knowledge and for development and improvement of health care in our society. When animals are involved in this kind of research, it is necessary to have strong ethical rules and evaluations; but even more importantly, trustful and open dialogues with the public. This communication must be carried out in a way that both the scientific and the public community are satisfied.

The public must have trust in the scientific community. They must trust that we all are carrying out experiments regulated by national, European or International laws. We need to be open and communicate with the public about why and how we are performing research including animal experimentation.

Different strategies can be used, i.e.:

- Openness and transparency are essential, but issues, such as personal security and illegal activities of animal rights extremists, must be considered,

- Internal and external communications and information flow within and between stakeholder groups,
- The strategy must ensure that the right information is provided to the right people at the right time.
- An effective communication strategy is to establish a dialogue rather than simply the one-way transmission of information.

It is sometimes also difficult to identify who has the information and who and what should be communicated. To simplify we could say: everything that is relevant and can be of help for the public to understand, evaluate and establish their opinion is important to communicate.

The emphasis should, of course, be on increasing the knowledge, necessary for both the ethically sustainable, and the scientifically valid use of animals in research – and addressing issues relating to ethical evaluation and cost-benefit analysis. If scientific validity cannot be demonstrated, then there is no sustainable ethical basis for the use of animals in procedures with the potential to cause them pain, suffering, and distress.

The outputs would be framed within the following general assumptions: The scientific community is driven by a desire for good science and good animal welfare. Openness and transparency are essential for successful communication, but issues, such as personal security and illegal activities of animal rights extremists, must be considered.
Finally, to achieve mutual respect of scientists and the public for the research that is carried out which involves animals, we must consider the following:

- ethical evaluation of animal experiments is necessary to achieve mutual respect between scientist and the public,
- ethical evaluation must be carried out so that all involved and the public can trust the decisions,
- good science and research must go hand by hand with animal welfare,
- open communication and transparency is of utmost importance, but should be regarded in view of social factors.

Communication about animal experimentation and testing: an obligation and a two way street (Jan-Bas Prins)

There are four key questions when it comes to communication strategies:

- What do you want to achieve?
- What do you want to communicate?
- How do you research your audience?
- How do you measure your effects?

These questions are general questions and apply wherever effective communication is being discussed. In the case of communicating about animal experimentation, however, answers to these questions appear to be not so universal, but dependent on tradition and social background. Hence global answers are unsatisfactory in a world that is developing into an increasingly 'global society'. Are we then reaching for the impossible with the wish to effectively communicate about animal experimentation from the experimenters' point of view?
One step back is to learn from previous mistakes and from those experiences that have a proven track record. What tends to go wrong in communicating about animal experimentations is among others: stereotyping and generalizing 'the other'; not speaking the same 'language'; communication without communicating; trying to reach everybody with the same message through the same means; and to allow provocations by certain stakeholders to frustrate communicating with others. The last is often used as an excuse for not having to communicate at all. However, one has to be realistic on the one hand and not to be ignorant about possible threats on the other.

More effective strategies include: sharing reasons why it is still necessary to perform experiments with animals, but also the dilemmas that are not that different from those of the public at large; inviting the public to visit your animal centre and show what and how animal experiments are organized and executed; and not to hide behind others.

Evidently, instant results are not guaranteed. More often than not results will only come after considerable effort and time during which the messenger has to earn respect and the message has to find its proper way. Join forces within your institute and beyond and seek professional advice from communication experts. Do not just copy, but learn from others and find the way that fits best in your tradition and society.

Discussion

Following the introductions by the panel members, the discussion followed four main topics.

Why communicate?
It was generally concluded that the public is not well-informed and sometimes even misinformed about animal experiments. Nevertheless, the public has the right to know about the why and how of animal experiments. The scientists are supposed to be the ones to openly communicate about their involvement in these experiments since they design and perform the experiments and, thus, can and should provide the public with honest information. It was mentioned that

scientists are not always aware of the importance of communication about their work to the public.

Many scientists, and in particular the management of scientific institutes, are reluctant to speak about animal experiments, because of the threat of personal intimidation. It may be questioned whether not communicating to the public will take away this potential threat, since information on animal experiments is already available through other means, like, for example, scientific publications. It was suggested to depersonalise the information regarding animal experiments when approaching the general public.

Public opinion about animal experiments is affected by negative emotions (with respect to animal welfare) and biased by negative preconceptions of scientists (they only care about results, not about the animals). Facts provided by scientists have to give the public the opportunity to develop a more balanced opinion on animal experiments and also to develop mutual respect.

What should be communicated?
First of all, scientists should be open and honest about animal experiments. Not only should the possible benefits of experiments be communicated, but also the fact that, in some cases, they may cause suffering in animals. To ensure a careful cost-benefit analysis of experiments to be done, in most countries experiments are weighed on a benefit-harm scale.

As the public seems to think that scientists don't care about experimental animals, it is also important to communicate that the scientists do care about animals as well and, thus, regard animal experiments to be an ethical issue. For that reason, it is crucial for the public to be aware of the fact that 3Rs models (alternatives) are being developed and used by the scientific community and that strict regulations are in place in many countries to avoid redundant experiments and experiments with avoidable harm to the animals. In addition, regulations require optimal housing and care for the animals. The public should be made aware that they, often unknowingly, make use of results from animal experiments on a daily basis, either for safer products or for better medical care. To provide the public with facts, they should also be shown pictures, even if pictures might be misused or put in the wrong context.

Finally, scientists should be careful when communicating about the potential use and importance of scientific results. Unrealistic promises, for instance with regard to health care or the development of 3Rs models, may have a counter-effect and, as a result, scientists may lose the public trust.

How should be communicated?
The most effective way is direct personal communication by, for example, opening the animal facilities for visits by the public and starting up a bi-directional communication. Moreover, the personal social environment – neighbours, family, pub mates, and colleagues – should be perceived as an important forum for every scientist to discuss animal experiments. Science cafés are also suggested as being important events to discuss animal experiments in an informal way, with the scientist not being an untouchable person in the ivory tower, but a human being with his or her emotions and personal opinion about animal experiments. This allows the public to 'personally' meet the scientists and get better understanding of his/her position.

With regard to raising awareness, it was suggested to label products with the information that it was developed by using animal experiments to assess its safety or pharmaceutical effects.

An Internet site is a good source of information, but a static one. People need an incentive to look for information on an Internet site, like an item on radio or TV, or an interview. Modern communication means, such as through the Internet, like Facebook, Twitter, etc, could be explored to communicate about animal experiments and the 3Rs.

Since scientists rarely are communication specialists, and communication specialists rarely are scientists, it is recommended that both should consult each other before engaging in public activity. Pinpoint the person who has the knowledge and skills to communicate at a lay level the facts of animal experimentation to the general public or specific audience.

Finally, it was stated that organisations, where animal experiments are performed, should increase their awareness of the importance of public communication. Often, the management hesitates to communicate about animal experiments, since only the potential disadvantages, but not the potential advantages are seen. It should be realised that information supply is not a one time event, but has to be a continuous process. It is therefore essential for an organisation to create a communication plan to be followed.

Whom to target?
In principle, no difference should be made between people or groups of people when discussing animal experiments. Most people are interested in the mere facts. At the personal level scientists can explain what they do to their direct environment: family, friends, pub mates, etc. Notably, even in the direct working environment, both the management and the staff

should be aware of the fact that and why animal experiments are performed in the company.

At the professional level, it is important to have a communication plan available. Communicating with the press is different from communication with students visiting a scientific project or the animal facilities. In addition, the government and NGOs should be made aware of the animal experiments and activities to reduce them.

The general public will not by itself search for information on animal experiments. If they do, it is often the result of a coverage on TV or radio that for a short time stimulates the discussion. Easily available information, such as via the Internet, should then be available.

Important targets are students at high school. They are involved, dedicated to discuss this topic and also to discuss their findings with their parents and others in their direct environment.

It was also suggested that, during scientific events like the FELASA congress, a symposium should be organised for the public from where they can obtain information on animal experiments and meet the scientists.

Conclusions and suggestions

- It is essential that scientists become more involved with communication about animal experiments and the 3Rs to the general public.
- Every scientist designing and/or performing animal experiments is responsible for good and open communication with her or his direct environment: family, friends and colleagues.
- When communication takes place with other groups in the public (eg. patient organisations, government, general public), it should be done either by scientists who have experience with communication to the specific group of people, preferably in collaboration with communication experts, or by communication experts after a briefing by the responsible scientists.
- Openness, transparency and honesty are the keywords when contacting the public.
- Effective ways of informing the public are guided visits to animal facilities, informing students at high schools and providing these with material for school activities, and contribution to TV and radio programmes.
- Participants have also experienced that science cafés, where scientific topics are discussed in an open and informal way, are effective for communication. In addition to the static websites, new communication means like Facebook, Twitter, etc, could be explored on its usefulness to forward information on animal experiments.
- The final aim should be that the public can develop an independent and well-informed opinion on animal experimentation.

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Basic assumption was that this is scientific research and important in itself - a discourse analytic study on local ethical committees in Finland

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Abstract

Most studies concerning the ethics of laboratory animal use have been surveys on the opinions of the general public. To obtain a more balanced picture of the field, it is important to study also the views of the members of the scientific community working within the laboratory animal discipline. In the present study the subjects were Finnish authorities or members of local ethical committees during years 1995-2005. The interviews were carried out 2-3 years after the local committees had been replaced by the new centralized ethical board system. The method used was semi-structured interview, the theme being how the interviewees spoke about the role and mode of action of the ethical committees. Discourse analysis was used to find out the strategies the subjects used to factualize the practice of animal experimentation. This practice was found to be constructed by seven strategies of factual discourse the main strategies being: 1) importance of scientific knowledge, especially the benefits of increasing knowledge 2) expertise 3) educational role of the committees and 4) progress in animal welfare. Our question is why the interviewees constructed this kind of version of reality within laboratory animal discipline. For instance, ethical issues or value considerations beyond animal welfare issues were left unarticulated. The results are explained by an empiricist repertoire that leaves out value considerations.

Keywords: ethical committees, discourse analysis

Although surveys on opinions of the public concerning animal experimentation are numerous, only a few studies have been carried out on the most important members of the scientific community in this context, experts within the field of laboratory animal practice. Experts are the group that has real power to define the common-sense of the scientific paradigm; the shared values and beliefs, what issues are discussed and what is taken as given.[1] For that reason, it is important to find out how these persons speak about their work and what kind of methods they use to make their work factual. Arluke[2], Orlans[3] and Graham[4] have studied the ethical committees in USA, Michael and Birke[5] in Britain and Borgström[6] in Sweden.

Materials and Methods

In the present study, the subjects were Finnish authorities and members of local ethical committees during years 1995-2005. Four of the subjects were authorities within the laboratory animal discipline and seven members of ethical committees having expertise in laboratory animal science. Thus, altogether eleven persons were interviewed. All the interviewees of the latter group had more than five year's experience of the committee work. They came from local ethical committees of the main universities (Helsinki, Kuopio, Turku, Oulu, Jyväskylä) and one research institute. Semi-structured interview method was used to find out how members of local ethical committees spoke about the role and mode of action of the committees. This method allowed the interviewees to concentrate on the themes they personally found important while ensuring a broad view on the general theme.

The main interview questions asked were:

1) What were the topics of discussion in the ethical committees?
2) Did the topics change during the years 1995-2005?
3) Did the society's atmosphere affect the topics discussed?
4) Was there any change in the application forms during 1995-2005?
5) How many applications were dealt in one meeting?
6) How many applications were rejected yearly?
7) How did the researchers justify their experiments?
8) How did the interviewee find his/her role in an ethical committee?