ANIMAL RESEARCH POSITION STATEMENT

Background
To advance understanding of serious health conditions and develop effective treatments for those affected, it is important to understand the basic principles of biology and the events that trigger diseases like Alzheimer’s disease. The relative inaccessibility of the human brain, as well as the slow progression of these diseases, poses real challenges to scientists trying to study the causes of dementia. To answer these important questions, researchers use a range of methods involving cells, computer models, human tissue and volunteers. It is sometimes also necessary to use animals, in situations where other methods would not suffice.

Research using animals has produced some of the most important findings to date and made real progress in the search for a life-changing dementia treatment. Any new treatment designed for humans must, by law, be tested in animals first, and the current dementia treatments are only available because of animal research. The most common animals that are used in dementia research are fruit flies and rodents.

Our Position
Alzheimer’s Research UK is a member of the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC), and supports the AMRC’s position on using animals in research. Experiments that involve animals are an important part of medical research. Animals are only used when there is absolutely no alternative, and their use is strictly regulated by the Home Office under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. We fund research using animals only where necessary.

Approximately one third of the research projects we currently fund involve animals, such as worms, fruit flies and mice. The use of animals in research is not taken lightly and as a member of the AMRC we adhere to a series of important principles called the 3Rs, through which we work to:

- Replace the use of animals with alternative techniques or avoid the use of animals altogether.
- Reduce the number of animals used to a minimum by seeking ways to find out information from fewer animals or more information from the same number of animals.
- Refine the way experiments are carried out, to maximise animal welfare. This includes better housing and improvements to procedures which improve animal welfare in situations where the use of animals is unavoidable.

This means researchers ensure they are using the minimum number of animals possible and take steps to ensure that the physical and behavioural needs of the animals are met, and procedures are carried out with minimal pain, distress or discomfort. Where it is scientifically appropriate the replacement of animals in research is an ultimate goal. Through continuous refinement of scientific design we can reduce the number of animals used and minimise suffering.

In May 2014 Alzheimer’s Research UK signed the concordat on Openness on Animal research in the UK, alongside 80 other organisations. Together, we have committed to enhancing our communication about the use of animals in research. For example, Alzheimer’s Research UK has developed a virtual lab tour, that helps to explain how new dementia treatments are developed, including the use of animals in research.

Further information
For further information, Alzheimer’s Research UK’s Why research using animals can help defeat dementia provides information about the role of animals in dementia research.
How can I support dementia research, but not projects that use animals?
We can restrict any donation to non-animal research projects on request. You simply need to let us know when making a donation.

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