

EDITORIAL

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## Animal Experimentation

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By Khalil E. Rajab\*

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**All creatures on earth are sentient beings. "There is not an animal on earth, nor a bird that flies on its wings – but they are communities like you"**

*(The Quran, 6:38)*

The Editorial Board of the Bahrain Medical Bulletin is now considering formation of an advisory group on ethics and animal experimentation, whose primary objective is to examine the care of laboratory animals and their use for scientific research. This decision is most welcome and appropriate especially in the absence of legislation regulating animal scientific procedures, or licensing act for the use of research animals as well as the total lack of any specialised local group to advise on these issues.

In addressing the whole issue of animal experimentation it is necessary to clarify the following questions:

What is meant by animal experimentation? Why it is done? Is it being done in Bahrain? Is there any place for animal research in scientific medicine?

By definition, animal experimentation involves the use of living animals for an enormously wide range of scientific and other purposes. Many species of animals are used: rats, mice, rabbits, dogs, cats, monkeys and others. Some of them are bred specifically for laboratories, but others, such as apes, are trapped in the wild and thereby inflicting considerable simian distress and suffering<sup>1</sup>.

Most of us are also familiar with the range of procedures performed on these poor animals. Those include: experimental surgery, infecting them with bacteria or viruses, feeding them with poisonous substances, implanting tumours in their bodies, placing electrodes in their heads, irradiating them, as well as many more insults and injuries.

The next logical question is what is all this for? It seems that more than half the animals experimented on in the West are used to develop or test medical, veterinary or industrial drugs and products<sup>2</sup>. Approximately another quarter is used in basic research to answer "interesting questions" which may or may not relate to clinical problems. A smaller proportion is used in the safety testing of non-medical products, pesticides, industrial chemicals, cosmetics, food additive and house hold cleaners<sup>3</sup>.

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### Is some animal research justified?

One cannot evade the facts that some drugs and vaccines do save some human and animal lives. Surgical developments involve, in certain aspects, experimentation on animals, for example, in transplant, plastic and microsurgery. One ought to ask oneself the pertinent moral question. Should the infliction of suffering on laboratory animals continue without any control? Does the end justify the means? It cannot be over emphasised that there is a need for some discussion and reflection in this highly sensitive area. Some may argue that animal experimentation is necessary for testing safety of many newly introduced drugs. But how far can we go? It seems that vested Pharmacological and financial interests play an important role in the perpetuation of this state of affairs<sup>3</sup>.

### Are there any animal experiments being done in Bahrain?

Most animal dissections are currently done in schools. Animal experimentation is still in its infancy and has been done only on a small scale. However, with two Universities, three main hospitals, schools, colleges and few animal colonies the likelihood for animal experiments does exist and we must plan for it carefully.

In conclusion it appears unlikely that animal experiments will be stopped in the near future. To be more realistic the committee should set their sights on attainable goals.

I would suggest the following main priorities:

1. To secure control over the requirements for animal research.
2. To ensure that no pain or suffering has been inflicted on the animals used for research.
3. To reduce the number of animals used.
4. To promote the development of humane, alternative techniques.
5. To prevent 'trivial' or unnecessary uses of animals.
6. To ensure minimum requirements of laboratory safety and care for research animals.

### References:

1. The use of Non-Human Primates as a Laboratory Animals Experimentation Newsletter in RSPCA Today Journal 1988:27.
2. "ANIMALS"; International Journal 1987; 23(VII):10-11.
3. Proceedings of the Animal Experimentation Advisory Committee Meeting (1987) – Research Animal Page of 'RSPCA Today Journal' 1988:38.