

<<MEP>>

28 September 2007

Dear <<MEP>>,

EGAN is an alliance of national genetic alliances and European disease specific patient groups with a special interest in genetics, genomics and biotechnology representing over twenty million European patients with inheritable conditions.

It is with great disappointment that we note your signature on the Written Declaration on primates in scientific experiments. We believe medical research involving primates is essential for the continuing advancement of scientific and medical knowledge.

If non-human primate research were to be phased out in the EU it would force cutting edge research, currently carried out by EU based scientists, to move out of the EU. Europe's Seventh Framework Programme for research and technology development (FP7) identifies health topics as priorities:

1. "Brain and brain-related diseases: The objectives are to better understand the integrated structure and dynamics of the brain, and to study brain diseases including relevant age related illness (e.g. dementia, Parkinson's disease) and search for new therapies."¹
2. "HIV / AIDS, malaria & tuberculosis: The expected impact of this area is the creation of a European research environment, where highly innovative ideas are conceived and new approaches to prevention, treatment and management of HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis can be developed."¹

For many treatments of brain diseases such as Alzheimer's or Parkinson's disease and vaccines for infections such as HIV, research in non-human primates provides the only means of ensuring that therapies are safe and effective before they are tested on humans.²

In recent months a new health threat has made its way into the European Union, a virulent strain of Chikungunya virus that has so far affected more than a hundred people in Italy, spread by mosquitoes. There is no cure or treatments available for humans. However, the only other animals known to be affected by Chikungunya virus are monkeys, indeed there is a known antibody in some monkey species.³ This is yet another example of the value of research in primates, because of their close relationship to humans.

It is the view of patients that research using non-human primate species is vitally important to future health advances, and should be permitted under proper regulation in the EU.

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The declaration notes “that despite genetic similarities, there are important differences between humans and other primates, and primate experiments cannot match the precision of human-based study;” and asserts that, “advanced technology and techniques now provide alternative methods that are proving to be more efficient and reliable than primate experiments.” This is simply not true, and those who claim that it is are disregarding the overwhelming body of evidence to the contrary.

All techniques that do indeed prove to be more efficient and reliable than primate experiments are used by researchers. No researcher wants to use primates unless absolutely necessary. However in many cases, including the three highlighted above, there are no reliable alternatives that provide the same quality of result in the same timeframe. There are some things we just cannot do without using non-human primates.

Banning non-human primate research in the EU would set back research and prolong the suffering of patients. We urge you to reconsider your endorsement of Written Declaration 40/2007.

Yours sincerely,



Alastair Kent **President** EGAN

References

1. Work Programme 2007-08 Cooperation Theme 1: Health (European Commission C(2007)2460 of 11 June 2007)
2. www.medicalprogress.org/reference/news.cfm?news_id=484
3. Changing patterns of chikungunya virus: re-emergence of a zoonotic arbovirus by Ann M. Powers and Christopher H. Logue Division of Vector-Borne Infectious Diseases, Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 3150 Rampart Road, Fort Collins, CO 80521, USA

Appendix

The testing of new drugs and treatments for safety. EU law, e.g. Directive 2001/83/EEC, requires that the most appropriate species are used to test the safety of drugs and/or vaccines before they are trialled in humans. There is no escaping the fact that primate species are the most appropriate, though it is most often macaques and marmosets that are used in this type of work.