

Improving the Scientific Basis for Regulation of Animal Care and Use

Background

The care and use of laboratory animals in biomedical research and testing is highly regulated. Regulation, together with effective voluntary programs such as AAALAC accreditation, improves the health and welfare of laboratory animals and reassures the public that animal care and use is humane and efficient. Animal-directed regulation evolved from four primary sources. The *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals*, first published by the National Academy of Sciences in 1963 and revised most recently in 1996, provides benchmark recommendations for care and use. It evolved from concepts first proposed during the 1950s by the Animal Care Panel which eventually became AALAS. Thus, AALAS has been instrumental in fostering humane standards for animal experimentation. The Animal Welfare Act, first enacted in 1966, and revised most recently in 1985 and the Public Health Service Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, derived from the Health Research Extension Act of 1985 and revised in 1996, provide policies, laws and standards complementary to the *Guide*. Federal Principles for the Care and Use of Animals Used in Testing, Research and Training enunciated in 1983 help to govern animal use performed or sponsored by the US Government.

Because the regulation of animal care and use has a profound influence on biomedical research, it should be based on sound scientific and ethical criteria. In this context, AALAS encourages the development of principles for assessing the quality and impact of animal-based regulation to ensure that it meets these criteria.

Issues

- Regulatory and scientific priorities can be difficult to balance.
- Regulation concerning animal care practices and well-being is based in part on empirical judgments which lack scientific confirmation.
- Empirically based regulation can lead to variable interpretation or misinterpretation and detrimental conflict between regulators and scientists.
- Empirically based regulation can impede biomedical research and make it more costly.

Positions

- Regulation should be consistent with the universal goal of society and biomedical science to improve and protect health.
- Regulation should be scientifically, ethically, and fiscally sound, and conducive to species specific health and well-being. The application of established knowledge about animal biology and medicine should guide the formulation and revision of laws, policies, guidelines and standards.
- Additional research, including outcomes research, is needed to improve knowledge about species specific biology, welfare, well-being, and disease pertinent to regulation.
- Regulation should not be duplicative, should be implemented uniformly and should encourage verifiable voluntary alternatives such as AAALAC accreditation.
- Laws, policies, guidelines and standards should be based on sound professional judgment whenever possible.
- Principles should be established to assess the scientific and ethical quality of current and proposed regulation.