Testing on animals is unreliable and unethical

With reference to ‘Animal rights campaigners have gone too far’ (Letters March 7), Linda Payne ignores the fact that medical progress occurs in spite of animal research, and not because of it. The list of medical advances achieved without the use of animals is impressive and includes cataract and glaucoma surgery, local and gaseous anaesthetics, digitalis and nitrate-based heart drugs, kidney and gallbladder surgery, Caesarean operations, hysterectomy and mastectomy.

It is important to remember that the species difference between humans and animals will always be a barrier to medical progress. The discovery of substances that shrink tumours in mice is a good example. The doctor involved in the experiment has admitted that while curing cancer in mice for decades, he is unable to cure the same cancer in humans.

Jan Creamer
Director, NAVS

The issue is not whether you care more about a rat or a sick relative, it is about good science. The National Anti-Vivisection Society (NAVS) does not want to halt medical progress. On the contrary, it campaigns to bring an end to animal experiments because they are unreliable, unethical and unnecessary.

Jan Creamer
Director, NAVS

Although I too condemn the attacks on laboratory staff at Huntingdon Life Sciences, I object to animal testing. Many drugs ‘safety tested’ on animals have been withdrawn when they have had adverse effects on humans – thalidomide for example.

Animal physiology is so different from humans that there is no way of telling how we will react to a drug until we take it. Aspirin kills cats and causes birth defects in rats, mice, dogs and guinea pigs, but not in humans. Penicillin is useful for humans, but kills guinea pigs. There are humane ways of testing drugs that are more effective, accurate and quicker, such as computer modelling, molecular research, population research, test tube tissues and micro-organisms.

Quest, a cancer research charity that refuses to test on animals, has achieved many breakthroughs in early cancer detection, and the first effective drugs for childhood leukaemia were introduced in the 1940s through studies on patients. Instead of condemning the few protesters who commit criminal acts, we should make non-animal testing methods more widely available. Maybe the animal rights campaigners have a point and everyone else is missing it.

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Lancaster

University of Leeds: a correction

Nursing Standard would like to point out that the return-to-practice course referred to in the article ‘NHS recruitment plays hard to get’ (Perspectives March 14) was not provided by or linked in any way to the University of Leeds, or any other institution in the city. We apologise for any confusion that may have been caused by the use of the university’s badge to illustrate the article.