

FENS Committee on Animals in Research (CARE) and European Animal Research Association (EARA) event

Communicating Animal Research: Challenges and Opportunities

Sunday, 8 July 12:30- 13:30 PM

In times of a globally increasing mistrust in science and scientists, animal research remains an especially contentious issue. There is strong and vocal opposition not just to research with non-human primates but to the use of all animal models in scientific research. Activist campaigns have targeted both private and public research. It is clear that neuroscientists must be ready to counter opposition to their work. Unfortunately public engagement by many European researchers and institutions remains hesitant, and often defensive. This lack of positive communication allows the voices of those opposed to animal research to dominate public discourse; 'alternative facts' become perceived truths with the result that public and political opinion is often uncertain on the use of animals in research. Countering these global PR campaigns necessitates the delivery of comprehensive and balanced information to the public on the benefits for humans and animals of the use of animal models in scientific research. Pro-active communication, and openness on animal research will encourage public trust, and allow the scientific community to speak with a united voice. In doing so, this prevents individuals and organizations from being isolated. Non-communication will only prolong opposition and mistrust.

Moderator: Suliann Ben Hamed (French National Centre for Scientific Research | CNRS · Centre de Neuroscience Cognitive)

Speakers

Ethical Implications of Animal Experimentation in Basic Research

Wolf Singer

Ernst Struengmann Institute for Neuroscience in Cooperation with Max Planck Society

Research with sentient beings is subject to strict legal and institutional regulations. In order to obtain ethical approval and funding for animal experiments an ethical assessment is required that necessitates weighing the anticipated degree of suffering of the animals against the expected benefit of the intended research. This practice assumes that two epistemic challenges can be overcome: To assess animals' suffering from an anthropocentric viewpoint and to quantify benefit. The talk will concentrate on the second issue. Benefits are commonly defined in utilitarian terms. It is required to prove that the expected gain of knowledge will contribute directly to the alleviation of conditions that cause suffering. While such arguments can sometimes be provided in the case of translational clinical research, they are rarely justified in basic research. The outcome of high risk-high gain studies is poorly predictable and the putative application of expected insights usually out of sight. The question will be addressed to which extent acquisition of knowledge has an ethical value in itself and is an obligation as long as we intentionally interfere with our conditions.

Animal Research: Time to Talk!

Kirk Leech,

European Animal Research Association

In a number of European countries, public and private research institutions have made the decision to adopt new persuasive practices and policies to engage with the public on the benefits of using animals in scientific and biomedical research. The belief is that being more open and transparent about their use of animals in research could help improve public understanding and acceptance. The need for a collective commitment is also important. These commitments are that institutions will be proactive in seeking opportunities to explain when, how and why they use animals in research; will provide information to the media and the general public about the conditions under which research using animals is carried out and will explain the benefits obtained from using them compared to other methods of research; will develop initiatives that generate greater public knowledge and understanding about the use of animals in scientific research; will place an animal welfare statement on their institution's website.

Neuroscience Outreach for +3 to 99 year-old

Cristina Marquez

Neural Circuits of Social Behavior Laboratory. Institute of Neuroscience of Alicante.

Engaging the public with the research done in our laboratories is of great importance both to sensibilise society with the rapid technological and scientific development we are living in Neuroscience nowadays, and for a better and efficient communication with non-scientific personnel within our research centres and universities. Many countries have agreed to adhere to Transparency Agreements while talking about animal experimentation. But how comfortable are we, the scientists, explaining our experiments to the public? What do we choose to explain or not to explain? In this talk I will share my personal experiences organizing outreach activities during my career, communicating my research in social decision-making in rodents, and discuss/ present novel strategies adopted during these years in different research institutions, the Champalimaud Centre for the Unknown (Lisbon, Portugal) and the Institute of Neuroscience of Alicante (Spain) to improve Neuroscience outreach for all ages.