



# LAY MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER

## Report on the RSPCA Lay Members' Forum 2004

The RSPCA Lay Members' Forum aims to support lay members involved in the Ethical Review Process (ERP). It makes information and resources available in response to needs identified by lay members and also provides a platform for discussion where people can share personal experiences of their role within the ERP. In response to a call for a meeting north of the border, the 3rd meeting of the Lay Members' Forum took place at the University of Edinburgh on the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2004. It provided a mixture of presentations and discussion and was attended by 50 people from a variety of designated establishments.

Maggy Jennings opened proceedings with the launch of the new lay members' resource on genetically modified (GM) animals. This resource was developed and written by Natasha Lane of the RSPCA's Research Animals Department (RAD) following presentations and discussion from the 2003 Lay Members' Forum which focussed on issues pertaining to the use of GM animals. It aims to explain the scientific, ethical and animal welfare issues in an accessible way, so as to assist effective lay review of the growing number of GM projects. The report is available as a hard copy or in PDF format by contacting the RAD

([research\\_animals@rspca.org.uk](mailto:research_animals@rspca.org.uk)). Maggy also reported on progress being made in Europe, in particular with reference to the uptake and influence of the RSPCA Lay Members' resource book published last year.

### The Speakers

Brendan Doe of the MRC Human Genetics Unit at the Western General Hospital, Edinburgh gave the first talk of the day, which introduced the 3R's and applying these to procedures involved in the creation of GM rodents. All of the 3Rs initiatives discussed are documented in the lay member resource for GM animals, illustrating how useful this resource should be in assisting with the review of projects involving these animals. The audience found this talk additionally useful as it outlined how the lay member may complement the Named Animal Care Welfare Officer (NACWO) in the local ERP.

The role of the named veterinary surgeon (NVS) in the ERP and the use of larger farm animal species in scientific projects was then discussed by Pete Goddard of the Macaulay Institute. He gave an insight into the welfare needs of farm animals and presented a stimulating illustration of one way of viewing the harm-benefit analysis. This presentation was widely appreciated by the lay members. They gained a greater understanding of the sort of advice





they could seek from the NVS, together with useful discussion of the different ethical and welfare issues that affect farm species as compared with the smaller, more commonly used animals, such as rodents and rabbits.

Ngaire Dennison and Kathy Ryder from the Home Office Inspectorate, gave an extremely interesting presentation on the structure of the Home Office and the Inspectorate, and their roles and responsibilities in implementing the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (ASPA). It was particularly useful to hear how these roles and responsibilities differed from those of the local ERP. They emphasised their approachability and that they could provide a useful source of information and advice for everyone working under the ASPA, which would be of immense value to lay members.

The importance of getting a feel for the “culture” at the animal establishment was the issue examined by Penny Hawkins of the RSPCA Research Animals Department. Penny encouraged lay members to visit their animal facility and outlined best practice in husbandry for commonly used laboratory animals. Further discussion of this issue revealed that an attendee had recently been refused a visit to their animal unit. This was a matter of particular concern for all participants and highlighted the valuable role of the Forum in providing a mechanism for discussion with other lay members.

## The Discussion Session

This interactive session focussed on assessing the justification for scientific projects involving animals. Jane Smith of the Boyd Group gave an introductory talk which was followed by a lively discussion session chaired by Kenneth Boyd. The session explored the difficulties in understanding the potential benefits of a scientific project, and weighing these against harms when considering the justification for projects involving animals. This was found to be a particular issue in fundamental research where the benefits may not be immediately obvious.

Lay members made many points and constructive suggestions including:

- There is a need for better lay summaries that clearly outline both the costs and potential benefits of the research. Note that this comment is made every year! In addition, many participants felt that it would be particularly helpful for the proposing scientist to be on hand to explain the research project in lay terms.
  - Access to advice on aspects of best practice relevant to their work which is independent from their establishment would be welcomed, together with the creation of an ERP help-line or online discussion forum where lay members could discuss common issues.
  - An open philosophy within the ERP is essential - it was agreed that there should be nothing to hide, so lay members should be
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able to see or ask anything they feel is important.

- Their roles in assessing benefits and justification were to give an impartial assessment of the ethical aspects of the project rather than the scientific aspects.
- The contributions of lay members might be affected or limited by their relationship to the establishment. An independent lay member from outside the establishment may find it easier to ask challenging questions about an application.

Note that very few of the lay members who attended the forum were external to the establishments from which they came. This may not be representative of all ERPs countrywide, nevertheless, we would argue for more extensive use of external lay members.

### Future Activities

The lay members' forum is one part of the ongoing work by the Research Animals Department of the RSPCA to help, develop and

support the ethical review process. Our next major initiative is to produce brief resources setting out best practice in housing and care for all commonly used species of laboratory animal. We aim to make these concise, informative checklists accessible for lay members, animal technicians and interested scientists. These resources are already available for birds with plans to include rodents, dogs, *Xenopus*, guinea pigs and rabbits within the next year. We are also considering organising a separate workshop for newly appointed lay members to help with initial orientation and to make the most of their role within the ethical review process. We are currently investigating the possibility of developing a dedicated discussion forum and website that will assist lay members to fulfil their role within the ERP by providing a network of information and support

Pamela Strahorn,  
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RSPCA  
8<sup>th</sup> Dec 2004

### **!!!NEW!!!**

Lay members' resource on genetically modified (GM) animals

- To aid lay evaluation of GM projects
- Explain the process and terms
- Discusses welfare issues

Housing and husbandry checklist for birds

To receive copies e-mail: [research\\_animals@rspca.org](mailto:research_animals@rspca.org)