



LAY MEMBERS' NEWSLETTER



Report on the RSPCA Lay Members' Forum 2005

The annual RSPCA Lay Members' Forum is aimed chiefly at Lay Members involved in the Ethical Review Process (ERP). It provides Lay Members with an opportunity to hear talks from people involved in a range of activities associated with ethical review and also to share experiences with fellow Lay Members so that they can contribute to the process more effectively.

Lay Members have said they find the forums valuable in that they provide a unique opportunity for participants from different establishments, and with different roles in the review process, to compare experiences. Hence "Comparing Experiences" was the theme of the 4th Lay Members forum which took place at the Institute for Historical Research, London on the 9th December 2005. The day included presentations from several invited speakers together with discussions and a workshop session. Over 60 people attended.

About half of the lay members were employed by the establishment whose ERP they were a part of, but were not involved in scientific work. The remaining half was external to the establishment.

The Speakers

Dr Maggy Jennings, Head of the Research Animals Department at the RSPCA, started the proceedings by reporting on developments of general interest to Lay Members. This included the publication of the Nuffield Council for Bioethics' report on "The Ethics of Research Involving Animals" and the review by the Animal Procedures Committee on Cost-Benefit Assessment. Lay Members within the RSPCA have been involved in the training events and ethical reviews both within European Framework Programs and in UK establishments. Maggy also highlighted a number of useful web-sites, including those of the NC3Rs and the RSPCA, that are listed on the last page of this newsletter.



Key Note speaker, Revd Prof Kenneth Boyd of the University of Edinburgh, gave the first talk of the day, "Ethics of research involving animals and research involving humans - what's the difference?" Changes in public opinion and legislation concerning the protection of both humans and animals used in scientific research from the 17th century to the present day were described. There were interesting parallels in developments in the two fields. For example, the 3Rs principles of humane science with respect to animals were conceived in the same era as the establishment of research ethics committees for human medicine. Recent codes of Good Clinical Practice for humans and the role of modern medical ethics committees concerned with humans were compared with current practices in animal research. Both forms of research involve the weighing up of costs and benefits and are concerned with the welfare of subjects be they human or animal. However, with human subjects it is necessary to obtain informed consent, to ensure they are not harmed and to protect the rights of participants.





Long-standing Lay Member, Revd Jeremy Caddick, highlighted how the process can differ depending on the size of the establishment together with the amount and variety of research being conducted there. In addition, the response of scientists to Lay Members can vary considerably depending on whether they perceive the ERP as being a worthwhile exercise, or merely an administrative hurdle. The difficulties that Lay Members encounter when assessing costs and benefits was also considered. Jeremy argued that costs to animals and potential benefits of research are not easily quantified and so cost/benefit judgements are essentially subjective and part of an on-going process rather than a one-off event. In making moral judgements lay people are as qualified as "experts". Focusing on costs and benefits can exert an upward pressure on standards of animal welfare whilst exerting a downward pressure on severity and provides a framework for interrogating projects.



Dr Jane Cooper from the RSPCA based her presentation on personal experiences of working at a research establishment. She said Lay Members can be instrumental in identifying scope for applying the 3Rs. Jane considered some of the barriers to implementing the 3Rs and the vital role Lay Members play in challenging or removing these. Barriers can be scientific, cultural or resource-driven or may be due to a lack of awareness of recent developments in the

3Rs. It was stressed that Lay Members can have a real impact within establishments in terms of helping improve animal welfare. They can also improve communication between departments and provide moral support for animal care staff that should have positive consequences for the animals they are responsible for. The key to these achievements was for Lay Members not to be afraid to ask seemingly naïve questions, to raise concerns and stimulate discussion.



Dr Derek Fry, Chief Home Office Inspector, spoke about "Controls on Scientific Work Involving Animals - How the Ethical Review Process Helps". Derek gave an overview of current legislative controls on animal use and the ethical stance implied, and the role of the UK inspectors in monitoring the UK controls. Inspectors assess and advise on licence, inspect establishments, help pass on information on good practice and encourage high standards in science and care. Only 30 inspectors cover the whole of the UK with some 230 establishments (varying considerably in type and size), 3000 project licences and 1400 personal licences. Inspectors have to assess against the requirements of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act, in particular the costs to the animals and the potential benefits from the proposals and whether the minister could be satisfied that there are no practicable non-animal alternatives and the work would use minimal numbers





at least severity consistent with producing satisfactory results. They also have to judge whether the work seen on inspection meets these criteria, and adjust their visiting patterns to get a good idea and efficient monitoring of work in progress.

He pointed out that inspectors should reflect national policy and the balanced approach of the legislation, whereas the ERP is local, advising the establishment's certificate holder, and can reflect local policies and what the institution or local community considers ethical. The required membership (named vet, named care person, project licensee and personal licensee) gives a balance between researchers and staff concerned with animal welfare and as local staff they can provide a continuity of scrutiny the inspectors cannot. Lay members are not mandatory but encouraged. As well as representing the wider community they can ask about the assumptions the non-lay members would not question, and help scientists explain their work to the public.

Derek then covered the three aims of the ERP (independent ethical advice to the certificate holder, support to named persons and licensees, promotion of ethical analysis and initiatives on replacement, reduction and refinement) and discussed the broad range of the ERPs functions. He looked in turn at each of the seven tasks (promoting alternatives, examining the cost-benefit of proposed work, providing a forum for discussion, undertaking retrospective project reviews, considering care and accommodation, reviewing managerial systems, advising on training), pointing out that lay members



could influence how often each was undertaken, and that lay members' skills, such as expertise in management or auditing, might contribute to the ERP fulfilling the tasks well.

The Workshop Session

Lay Members have requested guidance on the kinds of questions that can be asked about project licence applications. This issue was explored during a workshop session using a number of lay summaries that have been recently published on the Home Office web-site as a basis for discussion. Participants were asked to identify strengths and weakness of each summary, to draw up a list of questions they would like to ask the applicant if the summary had been presented at their own ERP, and to consider if any extra information should be included. The ensuing discussions highlighted a number of recurring themes and issues including the style and language used and whether sufficient information had been given relating to:

- Potential benefits of the research
- Whether an explanation had been given of why *in vitro* methods could not be used.
- Justification and explanation of the species and numbers of animals to be used
- Descriptions of what would happen to the animals and what the likely adverse effects would be





A summary of these discussions was subsequently passed on to the Home Office.

Other Activities

The Lay Members' Forum is only one element of the ongoing work by the RSPCA's Research Animals Department in developing resources for Lay Members. We have also been working on a series of guides to good practice in housing and care for commonly used species of laboratory animal. These documents were originally aimed at lay members but have also proved useful for animal technicians and scientists. Guides for a number of avian species have been available for a while but over the past year we have also added guides for:

- African clawed frogs
- Dogs
- Guinea pigs
- Pigs
- Rats.

These guides, plus other useful resources, can be downloaded from the RSPCA website. Additional guides are planned for the future.

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Your feedback would be both useful and welcome.

Email: erp-laymembers@rspca.org.uk

USEFUL WEBSITES:

RSPCA

www.rspca.org.uk/laymembers

NC3Rs

www.nc3rs.org.uk

Home Office

www.scienceandresearch.homeoffice.gov.uk/animal-research

Nuffield Council on Bioethics

www.nuffieldbioethics.org