

What's in a Name?

The NIH Regional Primate Research Center System was renamed the *National Primate Research Center System* in April, 2002 to reflect the "expanded role of the centers," according to its NIH funding agency, the National Center for Research Resources (NCRR).

As *regional* centers, members of Congress could politely ignore the scandals and questionable practices at any particular center because each was rightly seen as part of another member's pork. The new *National* appellation places responsibility for the facilities squarely on each and every member's shoulders. It is a heavy burden to bear.

Weightless Claims

On the one hand, the primate centers have produced little more than rhetoric in service to human health. A current example is the claim being made by the **Oregon National Primate Research Center** on its website that one of its **top ten accomplishments** has been the identification of a virus (Simian retrovirus SRV-2) that: "serves as a model for understanding and

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preventing HIV infection in humans."

It was in 1985 that researchers at Oregon identified this obscure virus. But the implicit claim that SRV-2 has been important in HIV research is little more than hyperbolic propaganda. SRV-2 is a D-type virus; HIV is a lentivirus. There is no readily available evidence that SRV-2 has been widely used as a model for understanding HIV, nor that, in the few cases that it has been used, that it has been a productive

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model. Most telling is the fact that SRV-2 seems *never* to have been used as a model for studies of HIV prevention. If SRV-2 has ever been used as a model for HIV prevention, the studies are obscure, rarely cited, and of little consequence.

Heavy Implications

On the other hand, a wealth of peer-reviewed research has demonstrated the close mental and emotional similarity between humans and the primate species being experimented on at the National Primate Research Centers.

A current example is the newest in a veritable heap of studies

demonstrating that young monkeys suffer as surely as young humans when reared without regard for their social needs, as is done at the National Primate Research Centers. The paper, "Stereotypic and self-injurious behavior in rhesus macaques: A survey and retrospective analysis of environment and early experience," was published in the May 2003, *American Journal of Primatology*.

Behavioral assessments of 362 individually housed rhesus monkeys at the **New England National Primate Research Center**, combined with colony records, revealed that: "individual housing at an early age, longer time housed individually, greater number of blood draws, and nursery rearing" are risk factors for abnormal behavior in rhesus monkeys.

Of the 362 animals surveyed, 321 exhibited at least one abnormal behavior and some monkeys exhibited 8 identifiable abnormal behaviors. The animals displaying self-mutilating behaviors were noted to have more "self-directed" abnormalities overall.

The paper simply restates what has been known about the effects of being reared in social deprivation for over half a century. Rene Spitz began his landmark investigation into socially deprived children in 1935, and Harry Harlow began publishing the results of his social deprivation experiments on monkeys in the early 1950s.

Is There Really a Balancing Act?

A dispassionate evaluation of the impact on human health from

(Continued on back page)

(Continued from page 1)

research conducted at the National Primate Research Centers demonstrates that claims of importance are simply misleading advertising. A similar evaluation of nonhuman primate cognition and emotion shows that our minds and emotions are strikingly alike.

The human-like suffering of the monkeys should be weighed against the claimed benefits that accrue to us from hurting them. But this is not done. The heavy thumb of those vested in the primate experimentation industry assures that the scale will always be tipped in favor of receiving more money from Congress. To the weigh-masters inside NIH, no evidence can be morally sufficient to tip the scale in favor of the monkeys.

Members of Congress should order NIH to step back and allow a fair and public weighing of the evidence; until that time, all funded studies at the National Primate Research Centers and other federally funded primate research facilities should be suspended.

DID YOU KNOW?

On July 3, 2003, the following Early Day Motion was introduced in the **British Parliament** with over 10% of the members as cosigners.

EDM 1307: PRIMATE EXPERIMENTS Baker/Norman

“That this House believes that experiments on primates cannot be justified in view of the important biological differences between people and primates and their well-developed intellectual and social awareness, which makes their needs impossible to meet in a laboratory and their suffering so severe; notes public opposition to the practice; therefore believes it is time for the UK to adopt the Zero Option, a total end to experiments on all primates; and calls upon the Government to extend the ban on the use of great apes to all primates as a matter of urgency.”

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