

Animal Research 2020 and Beyond

Digital Conference, 13th of November 2020



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This short report describes each presentation in a couple of words and has no ambition to go into details. We will do our best to make all presentations available on our website.

Opening Session

Rolf Zeller opened the meeting, thanked the supporters, members and ambassadors of BDS. He reflected on the last 10 years of the society, on its achievements, but also on the need to develop further. The original concept will still be valid, Animal Research Tomorrow will stay a grassroot organization of scientists, but we will reach out more to disciplines like ethics and philosophy and will make efforts to involve better the next generation of scientists into our activities.

Animal research has never been better and more responsible, and improvements are developed every day. Animal research is there to stay, new developments like organoids are very important great discoveries, but cannot yet substitute animal experimentation.

Nuno Franco took over and presented the new priorities and initiatives of Animal Research Tomorrow. We have to move from communicating to engaging with and listening to the public. Our association is not just board and conferences, we will engage better with our scientific basis, our members. It is also time for our organization to become more diverse.

He presented the new Animal Research Tomorrow award concept. There will be two awards, 3R award (with focus on reduction and refinement) and communication award.

Session 1

Chair Johannes Wilbertz

In her keynote presentation Susanna Louhimies gave an extensive review of how to use the EU legislative framework to improve on animal research. She talked about

issues of concern (ethics, reproducibility, extrapolating of data to target species) and presented tools the EC provides for all types of stakeholders to improve their work and communication. Further, she talked about education and training, not only of the current target audience but also “education of the educators” to achieve long-term sustainability. The final goal of the EU directive is full replacement, but the EC is aware that we cannot stop using animals today as scientifically sound alternatives are often not yet available.

Ana Isabel Moura Santos presented FELASA, the initiation of the organization 40 years ago, the subsequent growth, its structure and activities. She stressed, that FELASA is very open to collaboration with all organizations dealing with animal research. FELASA has changed a lot in the last years and is very happy to adapt to new realities.

Annemarie Lang gave various examples how to implement 3R principles in daily laboratory life and experiments routinely performed in her group. She also presented AnyMatch, an initiative for sharing organs and tissues of sacrificed animals with other scientists.

Session 2

Chair Ken Gordon

The keynote speaker Anna Olsson presented results from the CAMARADES initiative. She talked extensively about critical translational aspects of animal experiments and their importance for experimental design (randomization, blinding, age and condition of animals) and how this design can be improved.

Simone Pollo talked about animal advocacy and science as democratic goods, balance of interests and importance of communication between groups with opposing opinions.

In his presentation Matthias Egge talked about Harm-Benefit Analysis and its difficulties. He argued that from research we can reasonably expect to produce valid and good quality data, but not necessarily societal benefit. As social benefit is difficult to evaluate in advance, the focus of evaluation of studies has to be on scientific quality and reduction of suffering of the animals used, and not on potential societal benefits.

Session 3

Chair Richard Bianco

Kirsty Reid, the keynote speaker, presented the pharmaceutical industry perspective on 3R and animal welfare. She talked about EFPIA priority areas, communication efforts, education and training. She stressed multiple times, that collaboration is key for success of any initiative and gave examples of work with animal welfare organizations, multiple scientific projects within the EU, and efforts for improvements of animal welfare out of the EU.

Giulia Birolini presented PhD Bioscienze Italia, an organization of young Italian scientists, and their efforts to communicate with animal activists and media on animal experimentation.

Hervé Raoul talked about challenges of working with pathogens in high containment level (Level 4) animal facilities, the very limited capacity of the existing facilities, limited scientific and technical expertise (small community), the very specific biosafety and biosecurity measures. He presented the needs of the community.

Discussion

Moderated by Aimee Zuniga

The discussion started with the increasing administrative burden on animal experimentation, which in many countries slows down (animal) research and is extremely frustrating for scientists. Often it is a result of being overzealous with implementation of the directive, although it is not required by it, as the implementation is a task of the member states according to their own rules.

Later the panelists discussed the definition of ethical justification in science and defining costs and benefits.

And finally, is it possible to achieve full replacement, or are we always going to need animals for certain experiments? The general agreement was, that it will be very hard to replace every single type of animal experiment, especially in basic science, and animal experiments are therefore going to stay for a while. But science is not isolated from society, so we need to accept that at least some parts of this society want to stop animal experimentation, work in this direction and develop new and improved methods.

Rolf Zeller then thanked all speakers for the very interesting talks and to all participants for the very vivid and interesting discussion. He closed the conference.