

Talking to the public about animal research





Why this guide?

This guide is designed to help medical research charities answer questions from the public about the use of animals in research. Charities have contact with their supporters and the public in many different ways. They need to be able to explain how they are investing donations effectively and be equipped to answer any questions.

Whether our member charities fund research using animals or whether they focus funding on other areas of medical research, all AMRC members stand together. We all support the principle that animals can be used in medical research where it is necessary to advance understanding of serious health conditions and to develop better treatments and where there is no alternative means of finding out that information without using animals.

No charity decides to support this sort of research lightly and we understand that supporters, staff and the public want to know why and how these decisions are made.

People may have specific questions about research using animals: how and why the research is funded; what charities are doing to find alternatives; what conditions animals are kept in; how this research is regulated; what it helps us find out. This guide suggests some ways that charities can answer these questions and where they can direct people who want to find out more.



OUR SCIENCE HOLDS THE SOLUTION

WHY DO WE NEED ANNUAL RESEARCH?

At the heart of our research is a commitment to understanding the world around us and how it works. Our research is not just about the science itself, but also about the people who are doing it. We are committed to the highest standards of research and to the people who are doing it.



Contents

<u>Being prepared</u>	<u>5</u>
Creating a process for responding to questions about animal research	6
What makes a good case study?	7
What makes a good position statement?	8
<u>Answering questions</u>	<u>10</u>
Direct questions	10
Social media	13
Articles and letters in the media	14
Campaigns and protests	17
<u>Opportunities to tell people more</u>	<u>18</u>
Your staff	18
Your website	20
Press releases	22
Research facilities	24
Talking about your research	25



Being prepared...

The following checklist will help you prepare for questions that you might be asked about animal research. By gathering this information in advance, you will be ready to respond quickly.

- **Knowledge of the all the different types of research your charity funds.**
- **A position statement on your website explaining why you support the use of animals in research that you can refer people to.**
Having this or linking to AMRC's statement (<http://bit.ly/AMRCsta1>) is a requirement of AMRC membership.
- **An agreed process in your organisation for responding to enquiries.** Many of your staff will have contact with the public and could be asked about animal research, so you should make sure they know how to respond.
- **Case studies.** These may come from recent press releases, your research team or, if your charity doesn't fund research using animals, examples of treatments that have been developed using animal research.
- **A list of other resources on research using animals – either your own or external information.** Examples are provided throughout this booklet.

Creating a process for responding to questions about animal research

It can be helpful to consider some issues ahead of time, and set up a process for your staff to follow.

- **Identify a lead on animal research.** Someone who can advise your staff and volunteers on how to answer questions and suggest where they can find out information.
- **Consider when staff can handle the query themselves.** When might they need to involve other staff/senior management? Who should they involve?
- **Establish who is responsible for signing off responses relating to animal research.**
- **Identify a point of contact in the press team to handle media work around animal research.** A designated spokesperson or scientist able to talk about research using animals.
- **Decide when your staff shouldn't respond to a question.** Discuss what constitutes an unreasonable query and when it is okay not to respond, eg if a question is asked in a threatening manner or if a person persistently repeats the same question.
- **Ensure that public-facing staff (fundraisers, charity shop staff, etc) know what to do if asked about animal research by a member of the public.**
- **Ensure that all staff know what resources and support are available to respond to questions on animal research.**
- **Maintain up-to-date information about the research you fund, including case studies illustrating how and why you support research using animals.**
- **Keep a central record of animal research queries.** Keep an eye on the queries you get and identify the most frequently asked questions. Monitoring is also helpful if you are subject to threatening activity.

What makes a good case study?

A case study can help bring an issue to life with real-world examples. Think of it as being like a short news story. When talking about animal research, it can give people an insight into how and why animals are used in research and what this can help researchers find out. You may want to include the following details:

- The impact of the disease the research addressed (symptoms, numbers of people affected, etc).
- When and where the research happened – the more recent the better.
- Why animals were necessary.
- What the research involved: keep it simple, with no long, technical words or acronyms, unless you can clearly explain them.
- Any specific steps taken by the researchers to reduce animal use or alleviate possible suffering.
- What the findings were.
- How the research has benefited people: new medicine, how many people have been helped.
- If you have space, include information about the ethical review the research underwent before it could go ahead and how it is regulated.



What makes a good position statement?

Providing a statement on your website shows that you are open about animal research. It lets your donors and the public know why you support such research and is an opportunity to explain the high standards of animal welfare that this research must meet. Your statement should be clear, concise and easy to understand. You may want to include the following details:

- **You support animal research** (even if you are not actively funding it).
- **Why it is necessary to use animals in some aspects of medical research.** It is useful to note that a project involving animals can only be licensed in the UK where there is no alternative method available.
- **Your research complies with UK law and you support the 3Rs: to replace, refine and reduce the use of animals in research** (you will need to explain these words). You could also explain how you use peer review to do this.
- **Statistics on the proportion of grants awarded that involve animals and the number of animals used.** It may be useful to mention the breakdown of different species. This information may change from year to year, so you may wish to refer to supplementary information that relates to your position statement.
- **The majority of the British public accept that research using animals is necessary so long as there are no alternatives and suffering is minimised.** Findings of Ipsos MORI polling can be found at <http://bit.ly/MORIpoll1>.
- **If you fund research abroad,** you may wish to explain what ethical review processes are carried out. An extract of the Wellcome Trust policy follows:

Make your position clear

“ Wellcome Trust-funded research involving animals

The Wellcome Trust is an international funder of research and, while it cannot enforce the UK regulations overseas, it does expect that the proposed research is carried out in the spirit of the UK legislation, as well as being compliant with all local legislation and ethical review procedures. In certain cases steps are taken to ensure this through site visits to overseas facilities.”

The Wellcome Trust's policy statement can be found at <http://wellc.me/RhDqmU>.

Other examples:

British Heart Foundation

<http://bit.ly/BHFpol1>

Alzheimer's Research UK

<http://bit.ly/ALZpoli1>

Diabetes UK

<http://bit.ly/DUKposi1>

MS Society

<http://bit.ly/MSSpoli1>

Muscular Dystrophy Campaign

<http://bit.ly/MDCposi1>



As an AMRC member you support the AMRC's policy statement on animal research found at <http://bit.ly/AMRCsta1>



Answering questions...

All charities want to talk to the public and their supporters about how they invest their donations to make a difference. And they want to be able to answer questions about the research they support openly and honestly.

Direct questions

Charity staff and volunteers might be asked direct questions about animal research in a charity shop, at a fundraising event, over the phone or in a letter or email.

It is important that every member of staff, particularly those who are the public face of your charity, feel able to handle such questions, even if this is by directing enquiries to a more appropriate person or place.

Many charities give new employees and volunteers information about the organisation's position on research using animals as part of the induction. Online resources and leaflets are helpful for both internal and external audiences. Some charities have leaflets giving information on why and how they support research using animals and have collected case studies showing why this research is important for understanding the condition and developing treatments. These are particularly useful for public-facing staff and volunteers, such as those working in charity shops who may be asked questions but do not feel confident in answering them.

AMRC is developing a leaflet for the general public explaining why all AMRC members support the use of animals in research where necessary. This will be available for all our member charities to use.

Staff who are more likely to be asked about the charity's official position, such as the communications team, should be aware of the organisation's official statement and be able to point individuals to relevant parts of the website.

Case study

Answering questions: animals and heart research

The British Heart Foundation produced a leaflet on animals and heart research. It includes sections on why BHF funds research involving animals, what it hopes to learn from it, why there are sometimes no other methods, and information on the regulations that guide animal research. It also provides examples of BHF-funded research:

“ Researchers are looking at the way the heart and circulation develops in zebrafish embryos. A better understanding of how hearts are formed and grow in animals will lead to new ways of repairing human hearts. ”

The leaflet is available in BHF's high street shops, and from the website at www.bhf.org.uk/animalresearch.



Other examples:

Cancer Research UK
<http://bit.ly/CRUKbook1>

Alzheimers Reserach UK
<http://bit.ly/ALZleaf1>

For a quick response

The Muscular Dystrophy Campaign has prepared text that can be tailored to individual enquiries, allowing staff to respond quickly and accurately.

“ The Muscular Dystrophy Campaign funds research which utilises a wide variety of methods, some of which involve the use of animals. However, we will only fund animal research when it is essential and there is no alternative.

We are committed to the three Rs approach: to Replace the use of animals with alternative techniques, or avoid the use of animals altogether; to Reduce the number of animals used to a minimum, to obtain information from fewer animals or more information from the same number of animals; and to Refine the way experiments are carried out, to make sure animals suffer as little as possible. This includes better housing and improvements to procedures which minimise pain and suffering and/or improve animal welfare. To find out more about our position on animal research, you can look at our statement at www.muscular-dystrophy.org/animal_testing.”



Social media

Questions posed publicly on social media, for example on Facebook, Twitter and Google+, should be answered similarly, in public.

Thinking ahead will ensure that you can answer quickly and clearly. You will want to provide context, so it can be useful to include links to your website or leaflets which provide more information about your charity's policy on animal research. Keep your responses short and polite. Providing an email address for people to contact you directly can be effective in moving the discussion offline.

Case study

Responding on social media



Eemaan @Eemaan_faith

@CR_UK different organs etc to animals which work different to an animals organs etc. When people give you money it's to genuinely help



Cancer Research UK @CR_UK

@Eemaan_faith For more information on why animal research is necessary to help us beat cancer, please click here bit.ly/111SG3v

When responding to comments on Twitter and Facebook, Cancer Research UK links to a blog post (<http://bit.ly/111SG3v>) where people can find out more about how animal research is helping the charity beat cancer.

While it is valuable to engage with everyone who has questions about your research, it is also time consuming. It is fine to stop a conversation if it ceases to be constructive. When answering people's questions, you are not trying to convince them of the value of animal research. Giving them information about your charity's reasons for supporting such research allows them to make their own minds up about how they feel about it.

It is useful to have a policy on what constitutes disruptive or spam messaging and how it should be dealt with. Spam relating to animal research can be treated in the same way as any other.

Articles and letters in the media

People may ask you questions indirectly through articles and letters published in newspapers and magazines or on websites. Occasionally charities are named and criticised for their research using animals. If your research is misrepresented, you may want to respond.

Case study

A well crafted response

The following example shows two letters sent to the Derby Telegraph. The first (below) criticises four medical research charities for the animal studies they fund; the second (right) is the response by Parkinson's UK.

Letter to Derby Telegraph

Together, the annual income of these four charities is around £800 million a year. How much of this goes to funding animal experiments, they will not say.

Why don't they want it to be made public? It isn't only these four large charities, countless others do but there are many that don't.

People who are opposed to animals being used for medical research are not against medical research at all.

What we want is an alternative research using, for example, tissue cells. This is more accurate and reliable in many cases than cruel and unnecessary animal experiments, which can be unreliable and, in some cases, misleading.

Two examples are that penicillin kills guinea pigs and how dangerous Thalidomide was after proving safe in animals.

Why is it that after many years of animal experiments, the number of people developing cancer and heart disease is escalating?

Animal Aid's campaign is to ask people to boycott charities, especially the big four, as above, until they stop using animals.

We also believe that the Government should look at giving funding to current alternative research and to promote this method.

This high-profile campaign has had widespread national and regional media coverage and September will see a big boost with national advertisements.

Animal Aid can be contacted at info@animalaid.org.uk.

*Dawn Spencer
Dovedale Crescent
Belper*

Response letter from Parkinson's UK

IN her letter "Campaign seeks an end to research on animals" (Derby Telegraph, September 9) Dawn Spencer, of Animal Aid, makes a number of claims that cannot pass unchallenged.

Ms Spencer claimed that Parkinson's UK does not wish people to find out how much we spend on research involving animals. I am happy to be open about this. Some 40% of the £4.6m we spend on research each year is on projects involving animals.

Our research work is governed by some of the toughest restrictions in the world, enforced by the Home Office. Details of our UK-funded research are on our website and the research strategy which specifies the development of new models is publicly available. Our policy is also on our website.

Ms Spencer said that "people wanted... alternative research using tissue cells". We fund the Parkinson's UK Brain Bank, which supplies donated human brain tissue for Parkinson's

research. However, the use of human tissue is not appropriate in every case.

She comments that "animal experiments can be unreliable and... misleading". We know that research involving animals has been demonstrated to help to identify improved treatments, help us gain a greater understanding of the causes of the Parkinson's and ultimately lead to the development of a cure.

Since the 1970s, the lives of millions of people with Parkinson's have been transformed by taking the drug levodopa, which would not have been developed without the insights gained from research involving animals.

People who give money to Parkinson's UK can choose to support other areas as we also fund campaigning and support to improve life for everyone affected by Parkinson's. We'll keep doing that until we find a cure.

*Dr Kieran Breen
Director of research and innovation
Parkinson's UK*

This excellent response from Parkinson's UK is open about the research the charity funds and gives statistics. It discusses its work on non-animal methods, as well as the important benefits attributable to research using animals.

A researcher's perspective

Responding to an article criticising the numbers of animals being killed for research in the UK's universities, Mike Barer, Professor of Clinical Microbiology and Director of Research at the University of Leicester, wrote to his local paper to explain why animals are needed in medical research and his personal motivations:

“ I wish to emphasise that my colleagues and I see the use of animals in research as a personally challenging balance of moralities; the balance of human death and suffering against highly regulated experiments in which the animals are exposed to the minimum stress achievable in order to attain a valid result.

None of us would do this if we thought there was an acceptable alternative or if we thought the research was trivial.”

You can read his letter in full at <http://bit.ly/1mMY3UG>.



Hearing directly from researchers about how and why they use animals in their research can give the public valuable insights.

The main thing to remember in a reply is to be as open as possible. Your charity's position statement can be used as the basis for your response. Explain some of the research you do and why you carry it out. Put this into context by also mentioning some of your non-animal work, or the work to replace or reduce the use of animals your charity does. This helps reinforce the message that, by law, animal research is only used when there are no other options.

Campaigns and protests

Campaigns against charities from those opposing animal research are relatively rare.

The National Anti-vivisection Society (NAVS) compiles a *Good charity guide* each year, which lists charities that do or don't support research using animals. From their point of view, they mark a charity as 'good' if it does not support any research using animals and 'bad' if it supports research using animals.

As a member of AMRC, you have signalled your support for our statement on the use of animals in research, which states that, even if your charity does not itself fund any research using animals, you support in principle well-regulated research using animals where there is no alternative. We appreciate that this is a difficult area for some, and no matter how much we explain our stance some people will not agree. As long as those who disagree with the use of animals in research express their opposition in a non-disruptive manner, we should be respectful of their views.

Campaigns may involve a large volume of letters, postcards and emails being sent to your organisation. How you respond will depend on your time and resources. If you are receiving a large number of identical stock letters, you may wish to send a standard response to all. But it is worth remembering that online petitions often auto-create emails by signatories and can result in many thousands being sent. Some charities choose to reply only to messages that have been personalised in some manner or to those from supporters. This is a valuable opportunity to talk to people who care about why you fund research using animals and to correct any misinformation.

While it is not common for anti-animal research protests to target medical research charities, it can be a perfectly legitimate and democratic way for individuals to express their opinion. If you have security concerns about a planned protest, you should contact Support4rs (0121 274 0130) for further advice. If any illegal activity occurs, do not confront individuals; contact the police.

You may wish to contact Understanding Animal Research (020 3675 1230) for advice about campaigns and protests.



Opportunities to
tell people more

Charities constantly communicate about the health conditions they deal with and the research that is trying to find cures or treatments – preventing hearing loss, curing Parkinson’s, finding new treatments for arthritis. In doing this, they regularly have opportunities to explain the role of research using animals and why, where there is no alternative, they choose to fund it. In this section, we’ll look at the various ways your organisation can explain the role of animals in medical research.

Your staff

Your staff are the people who will be talking to the public about the research you do. As well as developing resources and support, so they are fully briefed about the charity’s research and can answer questions about it, you might want to give them opportunities to find out more and reflect on how and why you support this research.

Case study

Everyone's an ambassador

“ Because it's a crucial part of what we do, we talk about animal research in an open and candid way. Every single person at Cancer Research UK is an ambassador for the work we do, so our goal is to give people the best tools, knowledge and confidence they need to understand and talk about this topic.

Our fundraisers often ask me about what animal testing we do. Having a booklet to give them is really helpful, and I feel confident that the information in it will answer their queries.

Staff talks are incredibly helpful too – it's vital the information I pass on to the fundraisers is accurate, as they are constantly speaking to the public about our work.”

Gina Hadjipanayi, Training and Engagement Advisor, Cancer Research UK

Case study

Supporting staff

“ At Alzheimer's Research UK, we want our staff and volunteers to feel comfortable talking to supporters about all of the different kinds of research we fund, including research using animals. To support our staff in having these conversations, we held a half-day information session. This included a presentation by a member of the science communications team explaining the kinds of research we fund. We also discussed the benefits and limitations of working with animals to understand dementia and how animal research is governed in the UK.

In addition, Support4rs came along to talk to staff about how to deal with difficult situations and protests.”

Dr Laura Phipps, Science Communications Manager, Alzheimer's Research UK

Your website

The more relevant information you provide on your website, the easier it will be to respond to people's questions or for them to find the answers out for themselves. Many people will be looking on your website for the answers to specific questions. Commonly asked questions include the proportion of grants involving animals and the types of animals involved. It is valuable to think about the questions that are commonly asked when developing content.

And it is not just the volume and depth of information that is important but also its accessibility for a range of audiences. For example, many people searching your website for information on research on animals may search for 'animal testing' rather than 'animal research' and it may be useful to ensure that both search terms will direct people to the same page.

Case study

Part of the process

Alzheimer's Research UK has created the first ever virtual lab tour designed to help the public understand how new dementia treatments are developed. As users explore the lab, reading and watching videos about the pathway from bench to bedside, they come across sections explaining why fruit flies and worms are used in basic research and why mice and other animals are important to test the safety and effectiveness of potential treatments. The tour places animal research alongside other scientific methods, showing how it is part of the process.

The tour can be found at www.dementialab.org.



Making your position clear

The Parkinson's UK policy statement on its use of animals in research can easily be found on the website. It explains why the charity funds animal research, including the historical contribution animals have made to the field of Parkinson's research, how such research is regulated and their commitment to the 3Rs. It also details how many of their grants involve animals: *In 2014 we are funding 73 research projects, 34 of these involve animals including rodents, zebrafish and fruit flies.*

The Parkinson's UK position statement can be found at <http://bit.ly/PUKpoli2>.



Press releases

Research using animals has played a major part in the development of most modern medicines. To recognise the crucial role that animals play, it is important to mention them in press releases about new research or treatments if relevant. Animal research is a necessary step in drug development and discussing it in the context of the whole research process can help raise awareness of this fact.

As with any reference to scientific information in a press release, it's advisable to avoid jargon and technical language. Rather than talking about 'animal models', it is better to refer directly to 'mice' or 'rats' and explain clearly what is involved. Videos and images of animals can often improve a story – increasing pick-up without needing to invite a journalist to a lab. Providing your own videos or images can also ensure that the information reflects the high standards of animal welfare central to your charity's research.

Case study

Add visuals

The MRC press office publicised the work of scientists at the MRC Toxicology Unit who are studying neurodegeneration pathways.

The fact that video footage was provided meant that this became a visual story and helped it become the lead item on BBC Breakfast. The story, including the video, also appeared on CNN and BBC Online.



Positive coverage

On 12 September 2012, a news story highlighting the use of gerbils swept the globe and was covered by networks such as Al Jazeera, Fox News and the BBC. Yet the story wasn't a negative one. On the contrary, it was about a breakthrough – that stem cells had been used to restore hearing in animals for the first time. Gerbils just happened to be the animals used.

Dr Ralph Holme, Head of Biomedical Research at Action on Hearing Loss, explained: *We decided, from the outset, that it was important to be clear and transparent about the use of animals when announcing this very encouraging research result – and have been delighted by the level of positive media coverage and public interest that the story continues to achieve.*

The press release can be found at <http://bit.ly/UKGvYC>.

An example of a news story can be found at <http://bbc.in/NopgMI>.



Research facilities

Your patients are some of your best advocates to explain the importance of the research you conduct and fund. However, few of them will have been in a laboratory and most won't know what a modern animal facility looks like. Inviting your members and supporters to the research facilities you fund and arranging for them to see the animal facilities can be a really good way of helping them understand how their donations are being spent. Showing your staff around the facilities can also help them communicate more effectively to the public about how research is conducted and animal welfare protected.

Case study

Dispelling myths

Genetic Alliance UK teamed up with Understanding Animal Research and six UK universities to invite 38 families affected by genetic conditions to 'discovery days' at local universities. This gave them an opportunity to find out first hand about the role of animals in building knowledge and improving treatments for their own conditions, to meet the scientists using the animals in their experiments and to see how they are housed and cared for.

Attendees were surprised by the close bond between researchers and the animals and said that the experience dispelled many of the preconceptions they had of animal research. Genetic Alliance UK now plan to offer training and opportunities for the families to tell others about what they saw.

More information can be found on the MRC blog at <http://bit.ly/MRCblog1>.



Talking about your research

Many charities hold events for their supporters to find out more about the research they do and their staff go to meetings and events to talk about their work. These are great opportunities to talk about research using animals and explain why the charity is doing this in the context of all the different types of research you fund.

Case study

Meeting the researchers

“ We invite our highly engaged supporters to hear first hand about the work we do and to meet our scientists in person. Our researchers present a project they are working on and will often describe why animals are used in the project and how this will provide vital evidence and knowledge in understanding more about human diseases.

A recent example was a study that looked at whether supplementing the diet with sialic acid can reduce loss of filtration function in the kidney. Rats were selected for the study because the biology of kidney disease in rats closely resembles that of human kidney disease.

We have always found our supporters acknowledge and understand the necessity of using animals in these studies. We always try to show exactly how this work will bring about a better future for kidney patients and our supporters appreciate this.”

Peter Storey, Director of Marketing and Communications, Kidney Research UK



The Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC) is the national membership organisation of leading medical and health research charities. We have over 120 member charities spending over £1.2bn a year on research.

Charles Darwin House
12 Roger Street
London WC1N 2JU

T: 020 7685 2620
www.amrc.org.uk

Registered charity no. 296772



Understanding Animal Research is a not-for-profit membership organisation that aims to explain how and why animals are used in medical, veterinary and environmental research.

Hodgkin Huxley House
30 Farringdon Lane
London EC1R 3AW

T: 020 3675 1230
www.understandinganimalresearch.org.uk