

GE Healthcare Position Statement on the Care and Ethical Use of Animals in Medical Research: June 2005

The Issue

GE Healthcare recognizes that the use of animals in medical research to advance scientific understanding of biologic systems and to develop new medical technologies is controversial. However, we believe that the challenges and burdens faced from diseases such as cancer, Alzheimer's Disease, Parkinson's Disease, heart failure and stroke, justify the carefully considered use of animals when no other appropriate scientific methods are available. This Position Statement sets out our views on animal testing for medical purposes and will be amended from time to time to reflect any developments in this field.

Background

GE Healthcare's goal is to enable healthcare providers to better diagnose, treat and manage patients. A key technology in this effort is the visualization of biological processes at all levels within the human body -- from the sub-cellular molecules and biochemicals that make up our genetic structure, to cells, tissues and whole organ systems. GE Healthcare has two business divisions, GE Healthcare Technologies and GE Healthcare Bio-Sciences. Both are involved in the use of animals in testing medical products though testing is predominantly conducted in conjunction with the Medical Diagnostics and Discovery Systems units of GE Healthcare Bio-Sciences.

Medical Diagnostics

This part of GE Healthcare Bio-Sciences is the leading global pharmaceutical provider of diagnostic and predictive imaging products and services. It is dedicated to providing healthcare professionals with products that expand and improve their diagnostic capabilities and contribute to the treatment of disease, and to finding innovative diagnostic and therapeutic solutions with a focus on cardiology, neurology and cancer.

Medical diagnostic products are used to understand and treat major diseases using x-ray, computed tomography (CT), magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), ultrasound and functional imaging. Contrast and radiopharmaceutical imaging agents are, in general, injected into the bloodstream to enhance images taken of the structure or function of internal body organs and tissues. These enhanced images enable physicians to more accurately detect, diagnose and treat diseases of the heart, lung, brain and functional abnormalities. In addition, the business markets products that are used to treat localized tumors such as prostate cancer and products used to treat pain from cancer that has spread to bones.

Discovery Systems and Protein Separations

These units of our business are involved in developing and providing integrated systems and solutions for disease research and drug discovery, development and manufacture. Our technology platforms enable the discovery, development and manufacturing of new medicines. They also allow researchers to better understand the function of genes and proteins that may be responsible for disease, and to screening possible drug candidates, develop them in clinical trials and to manufacture biopharmaceuticals such as insulin.

GE Healthcare Position

- GE Healthcare is a world leader in medical diagnostics and life sciences. The business provides pharmaceutical products for the diagnosis and treatment of disease and technologies for life sciences research and the discovery, development and manufacture of new medicines. GE Healthcare uses animals in its research and product development only when absolutely necessary. The efficacy and safety of our products for their use in humans is of paramount importance.
- Health regulatory authorities across the world set stringent guidelines for evaluation of new pharmaceutical compounds. These require that all prescription medicines intended for use in humans must be shown to be safe, effective and of the highest quality before being made available to doctors to treat patients.
- At present, it is not possible to determine the safety of products, or meet the legal requirements of health regulatory authorities around the world, without animal studies.
- All studies involving animals must comply with local laws and regulations including appropriate licensing requirements. Studies must also be scientifically and ethically justified prior to initiation.
- GE Healthcare is committed to using alternative non-animal studies wherever possible. Animals are used only where no suitable alternative is available. The business subscribes to the “Three Rs Principles” that advocate study designs in medical testing to Reduce, Refine and Replace the use of animals.
- All studies are scrutinized and approved prior to initiation to ensure they are necessary and are designed to minimize the numbers of animals used. Furthermore, all studies are designed to avoid or minimize pain, discomfort and levels of stress.
- As part of its business, GE Healthcare has developed a number of products and technologies that can help reduce the number of animals used in research. Examples of these include gene chip microarrays developed for toxicology studies and the IN Cell Analyzer for studying the impact of new drugs on living cells in real-time.
- Questions and answers on GE Healthcare's involvement with animal testing are attached.

Further information sources

For more information relating to the use of animals in medical research visit the Research Defence Society web page at: www.rds-online.org.uk/faqquest.html

Or contact Animals in Medical Research Information Centre, 12 Whitehall, London, SW1A 2DY, for a wide range of information on this subject

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Questions and Answers on GE Healthcare's Use of Animals

Does GE Healthcare use animals in pharmaceutical research and development?

Yes. GE Healthcare, like other healthcare companies, must ensure the safety, quality and efficacy of its products used in humans. To achieve this currently requires the use of animals in some of our work to help develop new medical products and technologies. At all times the company's use of animals in medical research adheres to the highest standards of husbandry and ethical treatment. We adhere to the guiding principles of reduce, refine and replace through which animal research is confined to an absolute minimum and, whenever appropriate, we utilize methods that do not require the use of animals.

Where does GE Healthcare stand on the issue of animal research?

GE Healthcare is a world leader in medical diagnostics and life sciences, delivering pharmaceutical products for the diagnosis and treatment of disease and technologies for life science research and drug discovery, development and manufacture. In all areas where we have made discoveries in medical diagnostics, the use of animals has played a crucial role. Recent developments in the fields of genetics, molecular biology and advanced computing are providing unprecedented opportunities for advancements in the area of medical diagnostics while simultaneously reducing the need for animal research. We expect that today's research will result in future medical diagnostic solutions that will benefit both healthcare delivery and patient outcomes. These future discoveries will be dependent, in part, on the continuation of research work involving the limited use of animals.

Is there really no alternative to testing on animals?

Although work continues into the use of 'in vitro' methods and some 'in silico' methods, these are not yet able to reproduce the complexity of the 'in vivo' or whole animal systems. Non-animal methods are important tools used to refine and support studies that require testing on animals. However, the use of animals still remains essential in bridging the gap between the discovery of safe and effective healthcare products and the conquering of disease.

What is GE Healthcare's attitude toward the many animal welfare organizations?

GE Healthcare conducts animal research with the utmost concern for the wellbeing of the animals involved and we support legitimate animal welfare concerns and the law-abiding organizations that represent them. However, we condemn organizations whose pursuit of animal rights involves harassment of people, damage to property and other acts of aggression. GE Healthcare believes that it is the role of government to derive and enforce appropriate legislation to control the use of animals in medical research and that all advocacy groups seeking to influence that legislation should use the democratic process in their endeavors.