THE POTENTIAL FOR THE INSTITUTIONAL ANIMAL COMMITTEE

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This goal can be accomplished by court and other action constructing and enforcing existing laws, by new legislation improving such committees and, once a member, stand down again and again. A strong advocate will have an effect for protection even if that advocate is voted out or experiments may be a private matter, but the use of animals for these purposes is a public matter.

GOALS

1. The committee should be given the responsibility and authority to require the explanation in advance of a reasonable rationale for the proposed use of animals, what is to be achieved, what benefit it will provide, and why animal protection should be considered. Such a committee must be one of the best hopes, if not the only hope, for the diminishment and eventual elimination of animal suffering in laboratories. The article “Serving on an Institutional Animal Committee—How to Avoid Being Abused” describes how one particular committee operates and what kinds of cases it considers. The committee can do good things but that more is needed. I urge those concerned with animal protection not to be discouraged by the work of such committees. The committees can serve as a force for change and improvement as just described, we will unite ourselves, act more effectively, and increase our chances of achieving our goals.

I firmly believe that the committee on which I served did in fact lessen animal suffering by its very existence, by its review of procedures and facilities, and by its requirements for change. Although others may have had very unsatisfactory experiences on or with institutional animal committees, the committee concept should not be abandoned. As long as our human society requires the removal and use of animals for testing, our goal must be to minimize their suffering; a responsible committee set up for that purpose must be one of the most important means of achieving the goal. Members of such committees should be knowledgeable for the scientific aspects of the matters that come before them, including the physiological and psychological effects on the animal subjects, and should conscientiously represent the welfare of the animal subjects and the public concern for ending animal suffering. With a spirit of cooperation, public and scientific members of the committee should together seek to implement society’s concern for animal welfare and always seek to reduce animal usage and preclude suffering. This is what the AWA is about, but its provisions and implementation need strengthening and broadening. The committee concept should not be abandoned or deprecates as useless this committee concept, as some have argued, because of ineffective committees. If the committee concept has involved institutional animal committees, the movement will be more effective. This can best be done by being a force of conscience within the system and by constantly seeking to eliminate all suffering. The AWA itself is by its very title and by its specific reference to “society’s concern for the animals under its care” whether the welfare of the animal subjects can be analyzed. The resistance to such usage is that laboratory animals are not mere commodities, but they are sentient beings that are capable of experiencing pain. We must work together to implement society’s concern for animal protection and wish to be effective, but if we put forth a basic blueprint for change and improvement as just described, we will unite ourselves, act more effectively, and increase our chances of achieving our goals.