

Article Review

Ensuring ethical animal welfare research:

Are more ethics review committees the solution?

General Feedback

Overall, the authors provide a solid argument that increasing the number of ethics review committees alone does not suffice to address all ethical problems that come with animal experiments. Aside from the accessibility of ethics review committees, the authors refer to questionable criteria upon which such committees act, regional differences, and biases within committees. They propose creative and promising solutions, such as integrating the ethical decision-making process in the final paper and introducing committees that review the research plan before the experiment is conducted. Although the arguments provided by the author consistently show that both solutions would help address several shortcomings of the current ethical review process, the authors could make an even more convincing case by considering the objections raised below.

Evaluation of the various components of the article

Title

The title is attractive and already suggests that there is more to ensuring ethical animal welfare research than simply increasing the number of ethics review committees. Some of the solutions proposed in the article would probably require a significant increase in ethical review committees, so increasing the number of committees would be part of it, but the authors properly address the benefits of increasing the number of ethics review committees as well.

Introduction

The function of ethical review committees is properly explained. One could maybe highlight that such committees endorse a utilitarian way of reasoning by weighing the benefits against the harms caused by the experiment rather than rights-based views, which exist in the literature, and generally question animal use.

Problem Analysis

The problems associated with ethics approval are adequately explained. One might still consider listing the international differences and the resulting unequal access to ethical review under this section rather than as part of the section explaining the functioning.

Main Argument

The proposed solution of training researchers and reviewers in ethics and including an ethical justification in the article, is highly sensible and helps address problems, which cannot be tackled by increasing the number of committees. This would indeed lead to increased transparency and more engagement of the researchers with the ethical questions behind it.

At some point, the dialectic is missing. The paper would be stronger if it included objections to the proposed solutions. How can be ensured that researchers and have access to a proper ethics training? How can biases inherent in the discipline be prevented? It could be the case that researchers working with lab animals are less sceptical of animal experimentation than members of an ethics committee.

The idea of implementing methodological review boards or registered is an interesting addition as well. Indeed, prevention is better than correction. Here as well, some objections could be dealt with to make a stronger case for this measure. Previously, the authors argued that demanding that all studies undergo ethics review bears the risk of ethical review becoming a box-ticking exercise. This objection might also hold for the proposal. Furthermore, many of the accessibility and effort-related objection towards ethical review committees might apply to such boards as well.

Conclusion

Overall, the arguments and conclusions reached in this paper are adequately summarised. Qua structure, the final paragraph of the previous section already reads like a conclusion, which leads to some redundancy in this section. It might be considerable to combine both paragraphs into one final conclusion.

References

The referencing style is consistent and relevant sources are included.