Animal Care and Experimentation Committee 2012-2013 Report

Bill Yates completed his term as committee chair on December 31, 2012, and I am grateful for the leadership and direction he provided the Animal Care and Experimentation Committee. During 2012-2013, the ACE Committee focused on promoting research advocacy and reducing burdensome animal welfare oversight. We also provided comments to the National Institutes of Health concerning its plans to implement the Institute of Medicine’s recommendations for the use of chimpanzees in biomedical research.

Advocacy: Americans for Medical Progress President Jacquie Calnan met with the ACE Committee in Bethesda during our fall meeting. She pointed out that since “scientists are at the forefront of biomedical advances... who better to explain the importance of research, the need for animal models, and the care that the animals receive?” She then suggested various ways that scientists can engage in effective outreach by sharing stories about why our research is important with the friends, neighbors, and family members we encounter in our daily lives. A written version of her presentation is posted online at http://www.the-aps.org/mm/SciencePolicy/Advocacy/Advocacy-Resources/Finding-Advocacy-Opportunities.html.

In 2013, the ACE and Science Policy Committees jointly launched a Chapter Advocacy Outreach Program to provide speakers to three state chapter meetings. Richard Nichols was selected to make a presentation at the Iowa Physiological Society’s meeting on September 21. Speakers from the Science Policy Committee will give presentations at the Nebraska and Arizona chapter meetings. Other chapters are invited to contact the APS Office of Science Policy to request Advocacy Outreach Speakers in 2014.

The ACE Committee also continues to grapple with how best to provide appropriate resources for researchers engaged in educational outreach.

Regulatory burden: At its fall 2012 meeting, the ACE Committee met with Carol Clarke of USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. Dr. Clarke provided an update on USDA’s current regulatory activities. Because regulatory burden has been an increasing problem, in March 2013, the National Science Board issued a Request for Information on reducing administrative burden. The APS submitted comments about animal research regulations, emphasizing that the objective should be “to ensure animal welfare while minimizing unnecessary burden.” The full APS response is posted on the Science Policy web pages at http://www.the-aps.org/mm/SciencePolicy/About/Comments-Letters/AdministrativeBurden.pdf.

Chimpanzees in Biomedical Research: On March, 22, 2013, the APS submitted comments to the NIH on proposed plans to implement the Institute of Medicine’s recommendations on the
use of chimpanzees in biomedical and behavioral research. The comment letter, posted at http://www.the-aps.org/mm/SciencePolicy/About/Comments-Letters/WGcomments.pdf, voiced support for NIH’s efforts to “proceed down a science-based path to resolve issues related to future research involving chimpanzees.” At the same time, the APS urged NIH to reconsider certain recommendations made by its Working Group on the Use of Chimpanzees in NIH-Supported Research. APS asked whether 50 animals was the appropriate number since the Working Group established procedures to transfer chimpanzees out of the research population if they were not needed but did not provide a way to add more chimpanzees in case future need. APS also recommended greater flexibility in housing requirements and urged NIH to reconsider the Working Group’s ambitious timetable. On June 26, NIH Director Francis Collins announced that the agency would accept most of the Working Group’s recommendations. The NIH will permit greater flexibility in enclosure size and relax the timetable for transferring chimpanzees to sanctuaries, but no provision was made to add more animals to the research colony.

At the time the ACE Committee submitted its annual report, we were still working on a response to a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (F&WS) proposal to re-classify all captive chimpanzees as endangered. This would mean that research with chimpanzees would require a special permit. The APS subsequently submitted comments urging the F&WS to ensure that biomedical research with captive chimpanzees can continue if the re-classification goes forward. The August 12, 2013 letter noted that “chimpanzees stand in a unique position” in that they “face major threats to their continued existence in the wild.” However, “at the same time, captive chimpanzees have served as an important biomedical research model,” the letter said. The letter also emphasized that scientific research is consistent with the purposes of the Endangered Species Act. “Given the many protections already in place for chimpanzees in biomedical research, the APS urges F&WS to expedite the permitting process to minimize its impact on the development and dissemination of treatments for serious diseases.” These comments are available online at http://the-aps.org/mm/SciencePolicy/About/Comments-Letters/FWSComments.pdf.

Science Policy News: In June 2012, the APS Science Policy Office initiated a new publication, Science Policy News (SP News). This is a monthly electronic bulletin with a strong focus on advocacy oriented information. APS members who would like to subscribe can send an email request to sciencepolicy@the-aps.org.

Future Activities: The fall ACE meeting is scheduled to meet October 15-16, 2013 in Bethesda. The Committee is also preparing a Public Affairs symposium to be presented in San Diego at EB 2014 entitled, “Administrative Burden: Impact on research and how to address it.”

Respectfully submitted,
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Chair, Animal Care and Experimentation Committee