

# **A Gadfly in Training: Guinea pigs needed for human health**

By Susan Bonicillo  
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Before I left for college, I noticed a change in my mother. She'd usually been a very agreeable woman, but that all changed one day. Without warning, she launched into the most irrational tirades. Alternating between her native tongue of Tagalog and English, she combined the two to make up dirty and clever bits of profanity that I have yet to hear topped.

My father, brothers and I were dumbfounded by this new behavior. Naturally, to make sense of it all, we blamed each other. The finger-pointing led us nowhere. In lieu of a rational explanation, we made every effort to see to her happiness, like making sure to turn all of her ceramic elephant figurines east, lest she decide to let my father know what she really thought of his mother.

Then, after a visit to her doctor, all was made clear. My mother proudly declared that she was undergoing menopause. Luckily, I was leaving for college, which meant, unlike the rest of my family, I would escape this unpredictable ride of womanhood.

So, last week when the Wildcat covered a story about UA research on menopause, I received the news with mixed feelings. Though I regretted that the research didn't come sooner when my mother experienced her "change of life," I appreciated the fact that the knowledge gained would undoubtedly be useful for the next generation of women and the people who have to live with them.

Essential to the research process is injecting mice with VCD, a chemical that induces menopause. Because the experiment uses animals, it predictably raised concerns in the campus community regarding animal rights.

Like a lot of people, I have a soft spot in my heart for all things warm and fuzzy. However, that feeling does not override the fact that the benefits from animal research far outweigh any ounce of sentimentality.

The high quality of modern human life owes much to research involving animals. Without it, we would still be racked with the same diseases that beset our ancestors. Animal testing has given us the antibiotics and vaccinations without which we would not have survived past infancy. Our knowledge of nutrition and the development of life-saving surgical techniques such as heart bypass surgery would not be possible without animal research. Our life expectancy has increased by 20.8 years because of animal

research, according to the Department of Health and Human Services. The very fact that we breathe is a testament to the benefits of the clinical use of animals.

By virtue of their ethical standards, some animal rights activists oppose profiting from animal testing that uses knowledge gained and procedures developed from it. Ingrid Newkirk, the president and co-founder of PETA, is noted for saying, "Even if animal research were to produce a cure for AIDS, we'd be against it." If animal rights activists were to adhere to this kind of philosophy then, by extension, they would have to denounce not only current medical research but also all the medicines, procedures and knowledge from which they have already benefited.

Such thinking is not only ridiculous but poses a severe block toward progress of any kind.

Granted, the spirit of the animal rights movement is a noble one. We should all hope to live with such respect for all walks of life. However, this kind of philosophy is not only hopelessly idealistic, it just isn't possible. To survive requires the killing of something. No one is entirely free of inflicting pain or death.

Case in point: Animal rights activists advocate an entirely vegetarian or vegan diet because it doesn't involve the killing or exploitation of animals. However, even that entails death because animals are still killed to create the farms that grow the fruits and vegetables that comprise their "animal-friendly" lifestyle.

Even the greatest minds in the medical field acknowledge that using animals is still necessary. A 1996 survey of all past Nobel Prize winners in medicine and physiology unanimously supported medical research with animals as crucial for the betterment of humankind.

In animal testing, the medical establishment is given an invaluable tool. Because of its research, the human condition is forever changed for the better. Though animals are as much a part of this world as we are, the highest priority should be given to fellow human beings.

The whole concept of animal rights is not only a misguided issue to champion, but also presents a problem for the preservation and improvement of human life.

Animal testing is an ugly fact, but it still is essential.

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