



Quick advice for animal welfare

A large group of experts supports the National Committee

Heart disorders, cancer, Alzheimer's or dementia – animal experiments are still necessary for a better understanding of serious diseases and development of new therapies. Genetically modified mice which contract tumours or whose brains are susceptible to an inherited variant of Alzheimer's are used, for example. Projects of this kind are of great importance for medicine and science. But how should they be assessed from the point of view of animal welfare? "We are involved in particular with the question of how much distress the animals experience due to the genetic modification," says private lecturer Dr. Bettina Bert, "and what has to be done to improve their wellbeing".

Ms. Bert, veterinarian at the German Centre for the Protection of Laboratory Animals at the BfR, works for the "National Committee for the Protection of Animals used for Scientific Purposes" ("National Committee" for short). One of the legally stipulated tasks of this independent committee is to advise licensing authorities and animal welfare bodies in Germany on questions relating to the care, breeding and accommodation of laboratory animals. Expert opinions are prepared for these consultancy tasks in line with the "3R principle" which stipulates that laboratory animals should be substituted whenever possible, their numbers reduced and their welfare improved (replace, reduce, refine). The example of genetically modified laboratory animals shows how challenging the severity assessment of animal experiments is in this age of rapidly developing methods, such as the "CRISPR" gene editing scissors. The National Committee can now obtain very competent advice in matters of this kind: a pool of experts consisting of 127 specialists from Germany and Austria supports it. The inaugural event of the pool of experts was held at the BfR on 11 October 2018.

"We have made very good experiences with workshops at which ten to twelve specialists discuss a topic thoroughly during two or three days," reports Bettina Bert on the work of the pool of experts. The jointly drafted results are published by the National Committee in scientific journals, for example. "All of the specialists have been appointed as members of the pool of experts due to their outstanding expertise and not because they belong to a specific institution," explains Bert. "We also place the greatest value on transparency; possible conflicts of interest must of course be disclosed."

More information:

www.bfr.bund.de > German Centre for the Protection of Laboratory Animals > National Committee on Animal Welfare Law