

## **The Straits Times Forum**

24 December 2010

### **Room for greater transparency**

*By Louis Ng*

I REFER to Monday's article ('Study on facility to breed large animals for tests'). The Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (Acres) understands the importance of biomedical research, but we hope that the relevant authorities place a stronger emphasis on the welfare of the animals and show greater transparency.

We are encouraged by the comments from the National University of Singapore which stated that 'computer models, cell cultures and research methods that minimise the use of animals are also widely adopted at the university'.

This is indeed in line with the National Advisory Committee on Laboratory Animal Research (Naclar) Guidelines which are based on the principles of the 3Rs - replacement, reduction and refinement.

- Replacement of animals with alternative methods;
- Reduction of the number of animals used; and
- Refinement of projects and techniques used to minimise impact on animals.

We urge other research institution to place more emphasis on these principles, and also the Government to invest in finding more alternatives to animal testing.

According to the Dr Hadwen Trust for Humane Research, Britain's leading medical research charity, alternatives to animal experimentation are now available in virtually every field of medical research.

There is also a need for greater transparency in the industry.

It is mentioned in the article that the 'Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority (AVA) would not reveal the number of large animals used in research here'. These figures, and other details about the use of animals for biomedical research, should be made available to the public.

As stated by Mr Goh Shih Yong ('Face of AVA on call day and night'; Dec 8), the retired deputy director of corporate communications for AVA, 'it's AVA's culture to be open, we have nothing to hide... It's important for the public to know the truth, and to know what we are doing so that they can then make their decisions based on accurate information... And when you share, you shouldn't hold back, because the vacuums will be replaced by speculation'.

There must also be representatives from animal welfare organisations in Naclar; something which is currently lacking.

Acres hopes for breakthroughs in the treatment of diseases but we also hope that more focus will be placed on finding alternatives to animal testing and, in the meantime, testing is

done humanely, with consideration for the welfare of our fellow sentient beings who are experimented on.