

Head-injury Research Using Monkeys

(Borrowed from Michael Taylor and Gary Comstock, Iowa State Univ.)

As a veterinarian, you are part of the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) of a private west coast university. You are asked to review a new proposal from Dr. ABC of the College of Medicine in which he plans to use rhesus monkeys as an animal model. You have recently read primate behavioral studies reporting that rhesus monkeys can play video games (although their scores were never better than humans) and are much more adept at language-usage and problem-solving than previously thought. He proposes to place anesthetized rhesus monkeys in a specially-designed primate chair that grips their heads gently. The apparatus rapidly moves the monkey's head through an angle of 15 degrees and abruptly stops. The momentum of the moving brain inside the skull induces rupture of the intracranial blood vessels that replicates a stroke in humans. After the anesthetic has worn off, he plans to find the best pharmacological way of reducing brain swelling, thus diminishing, he hopes, brain damage and the clinical severity of strokes in human patients.

Questions:

1. Do you vote to approve or deny this project? Why or why not?
2. The chair of Dr. ABC's department confides in you later that Dr. ABC is an ambitious scientist with an abrasive personality. She adds that, in her opinion, Dr. ABC has little love for animals, and tends to cut corners. If you had known these facts, would your vote have changed?
3. If strokes were rare in the human population, would your view of the same experiment remain unchanged?
4. Assume that there are already a half-dozen drugs that are fairly effective at reducing brain swelling and damage. Would this change your judgment about of the experiment?
5. What if Dr. ABC offers to replace monkeys with dogs or mice? Does this alter your opinion of the morality of the experiment?
6. What if Dr. ABC tells you that he needs you to approve the project so he can get a big grant and that without the grant, his tenure is in jeopardy. He also tells you that he's relying on you as a fellow colleague to protect him from animal rights "nuts" (his word) who are in vocal opposition to this project. He leaves you with no doubt that his future is in your hands.
7. Suppose you receive a phone call at home telling you that your family's life will become "miserable" if you approve Dr. ABC's project? Would this change your vote?