

An Open Letter to Ohio State University

Why I Oppose OSU's Spinal Cord Injury Research Techniques Course

To OSU President Karen A. Holbrook:

I've been waiting for a cure since 1976, when an intruder shot me in the spine and left me paraplegic. For nearly 30 years, researchers have been telling me—and hundreds of thousands of others with spinal cord injuries—that they are on the brink of a breakthrough. But if funds continue to be channeled into animal research, this breakthrough may never happen.

That's why I urge Ohio State University to cancel its upcoming animal-based Spinal Cord Injury Research Techniques course, in which students will systematically injure the spinal cords of 269 mice and rats by dropping weights on their exposed spines. After this disabling procedure, the animals will be put through painful behavioral tests and surgical manipulations.

Here's why I oppose this OSU course:

- **Many physicians, scientists, and spinal injury patients agree that if a cure is ever to be found, spinal cord injury researchers must focus on clinical research rather than animal experiments.** We already know that *in vitro* cell studies, neural tissue imaging, and clinical research offer insights that cannot be found with animal models.
- **This course will only demonstrate what is already well known in the field of spinal cord injury animal modeling.** Unfortunately, students will not focus on the newest research techniques, including *in vitro* cell studies and neural tissue imaging.
- **In addition to being wasteful and redundant, the OSU course will inflict suffering and death on hundreds of animals every year.** The animals will only be checked for pain every 12 hours. Complications range from an inability to walk or urinate to post-operative or peripheral pains so severe some animals try to chew through their own muscle.
- **Rats and mice are biologically and physiologically very different from humans.** Animal models do not parallel human spinal cord injuries, and the development and perfection of a human spinal cord injury tissue model are desperately needed.

Participants in this OSU course constitute the future of medical research. They should be encouraged to “think outside the box” and develop their own research methods—ones that will truly advance the field of spinal cord injury research. Instead, OSU instructors plan to demonstrate only ineffective experiments on animals.

It's time to try a better way. I urge OSU administrators to meet with neurologists from the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine to discuss ways of teaching students to use non-animal research methods.

I want a cure. But I know that wasteful and cruel animal experiments are not the answer.

Sincerely,



Mary Ann Lederer
Cincinnati, Ohio

P.S. For more information about why this course should be cancelled, please go to www.pcrm.org/OSU.