2013 Progress Report

The Physicians Committee combines science and advocacy to help animals and promote human health in the strongest possible way. We’ve virtually eliminated animal use in medical training. We have made historic progress to end the use of chimpanzees in experiments. We have brought unprecedented awareness of animals to toxicology testing. We have built scientific credibility for plant-based diets, helping them gain acceptance by the U.S. government and by major health and research organizations.

We are now turning our attention to specific research targets: experiments in alcohol, diabetes, heart disease, Alzheimer’s disease, and antibody production. We also have a strategic quick-response team that tackles emerging issues like rabies experiments on puppies in Taiwan. We are conducting cutting-edge clinical research. And as the world’s appetite for animal products shifts, our online programs are reaching China, India, Japan, and Spanish-speaking countries.
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Ending Medical Experiments on Chimpanzees

In June, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) announced plans to retire all but 50 of the 360 government-owned chimpanzees. This victory follows a hard-fought campaign by PCRM and others to end experiments involving chimpanzees. Nonetheless, we have not forgotten the remaining 50. It is our position that holding any chimpanzees in reserve for future research purposes is unacceptable. Moreover, hundreds of privately owned chimpanzees not covered by the ruling are still warehoused and available for experimentation.

We are encouraged by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service’s proposal to list all chimpanzees as endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Currently, only chimps in the wild are allotted that status. Inclusion on the list would make it extremely difficult for any experiments to be performed on federally or privately owned chimps. We have worked hard for victory and eagerly await the final ruling.

Harvard to Close Primate Research Center

Following two years of pressure from PCRM and its members, Harvard University announced that it will close the New England Primate Research Center in Southborough, Mass., in 2015. Numerous monkeys have died or been seriously injured at the facility in recent years. PCRM has called upon Harvard and NIH to retire the 2,000 monkeys housed there to sanctuaries rather than send them to other research facilities. We will closely monitor their fate and continue to advocate on their behalf.
Wayne State Court Victory

For decades, Wayne State University (WSU) in Detroit has received millions of federal dollars to conduct exceedingly cruel heart failure experiments on dogs with nothing to show for its efforts. PCRM became aware of these experiments in 2011, and we have been campaigning to end them by reaching out to school officials, fighting the school in court for access to documents, filing legal complaints, and engaging the media.

Last year, the university slapped PCRM with a lawsuit, challenging our request for updated records and asserting that the school should be exempt from Michigan’s Freedom of Information Act. PCRM led a counterclaim requesting that Wayne State be required to provide the records. This April, a Michigan court sided with PCRM, rejecting WSU’s lawsuit, and ordered WSU to comply with our document requests.

An analysis of the documents we subsequently received from WSU revealed numerous violations of the federal Animal Welfare Act, including insufficient recovery time after major surgeries before being forced back into experiments, inappropriate treatment of side effects without veterinary oversight, and inappropriate surgical procedures, among others. PCRM has filed a criminal complaint with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and asked that the experiments be halted. This fall, we ran two ads in the WSU student newspaper condemning the experiments, and we leafleted with local groups in Detroit. We will keep up the pressure until NIH discontinues funding these experiments.

Tulane University Switches to Simulators

In March, after a six-year campaign by PCRM, Tulane University in New Orleans replaced the use of live pigs with the TraumaMan simulator to teach physicians in Advanced Trauma Life Support (ATLS) courses. In these courses, anesthetized pigs are used to practice procedures such as inserting a tube and needle into the animals’ chest cavities and cutting into their throats. After the training session, the animals are killed. Only four medical centers in the United States continue to use live animals in ATLS courses.
A Reprieve for Cats at UVA

Our campaign against the University of Virginia (UVA), which began in 2010, ended in victory this year when the school informed us that its pediatrics residency program no longer uses cats to teach endotracheal intubation. In this procedure, a tube is inserted down an animal's throat. The same animal is used over and over again, increasing the risk of tracheal bruising, bleeding, scarring, pain, and death. All of the cats previously in UVA labs have been adopted into loving homes. The university now joins the 98 percent of pediatrics residency programs that view nonanimal methods as not only more humane but also educationally superior.

PCRM Wins Decades-Long Medical School Campaign

For more than 20 years, PCRM has worked to end the use of animals in medical training programs at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences (USUHS) in Bethesda, Md. In September, USUHS – the only medical military school in the United States – notified us that the school has fully transitioned to the use of simulators.

Our campaign against USUHS began in the 1980s when the University proposed to shoot beagle puppies in order to allow students to practice treating gunshot wounds. Although those experiments were canceled, the university continued to use animals in labs across three disciplines. With continued pressure from PCRM, the experiments have finally halted.
Saving Animals from Pesticide Tests

PCRM provides leadership in promoting non-animal alternatives on a national and international level. In the United States, we participate in a 29-member working group comprised of industry, government, and NGO stakeholders that advises the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on how the agency can transition away from animal tests to more efficient and reliable methods for testing the safety of pesticides. PCRM's director of regulatory testing, Kristie Sullivan, M.P.H., was instrumental in the development of the group's recently issued recommendations to phase out required animal tests for short-term toxicities such as skin and eye irritation, allergenicity, and acute lethal poisoning. With such high-profile recommendations from its main stakeholder advisory group, the EPA is feeling pressure to commit resources to finally make concrete changes. Currently, as many as 13,000 animals die for a single pesticide to be brought to market; there are more than 10,000 pesticides on the market today.

PCRM also monitors EPA testing requirements for pesticides when they undergo periodic safety reviews by the agency. In 2013, we succeeded in eliminating animal tests for the fungicide triphenyltin hydroxide, which is used to control disease in potatoes, beets, and pecans. The test, which would have been used to determine the effects of exposure on the human immune system, involves administering the poison to at least 40 animals daily for 28 days – without pain relief – then assessing their immune system before killing them.

Elevated Status at the OECD

As Secretariat of the International Council on Animal Protection (ICAPO), an international coalition of 11 public health and animal protection groups with invited expert status at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), PCRM works on guidance documents, test guidelines, and other projects to replace, reduce, or refine the use of animals in protocols for chemical testing guidelines and regulatory programs. This June, in an endorsement of the work that PCRM and ICAPO have been doing since 2006, ICAPO was invited to take part in the Joint Meeting, which oversees all work related to coordinating member countries' activities on chemical safety and provides guidance to nonmember (developing) countries. The Joint Meeting sets overall policy for all of its subsidiary bodies and decides which projects are worth spending limited resources pursuing. ICAPO intervention at this level ensures that the development of non-animal test methods will be a main focus of the OECD's chemical safety work.
Promoting 21st Century Science

The National Research Council (NRC) has proposed a revolution in toxicity testing by harnessing advances in molecular and cellular biology, genetics, robotic testing systems, and computational power to better predict impacts on human health from chemical exposure. These methods, combined with enhanced environmental monitoring, will create a system of chemical testing and assessment that will eventually phase out animal testing. PCRM has been out front on this issue, educating regulators about this new approach and convening scientists to develop new testing regimes to replace common animal tests.

This spring, PCRM brought together international experts from industry, academia, and regulatory agencies to design a strategy to replace the current animal test for inhalation exposure. Toxic effects from inhalation are currently measured by forcing animals (rats, mice, and sometimes dogs or guinea pigs) to inhale chemicals until half of the animals die. Rats and mice are forced to breathe the test compound inside a tube no larger than their own bodies for four hours at a time. Every new pesticide (if inhalable) or fragrance, or new formulation of an existing product, is tested using this animal test, resulting in the suffering and deaths of tens of thousands of animals each year.

Workshop attendees drafted “best practice” recommendations for replacing animal tests with in-vitro (test tube) methods and are currently finalizing these for publication in a peer-reviewed journal. These will promote the standardized conduct of nonanimal methods to ensure regulatory acceptance. Attendees also submitted a proposal to OECD that, once completed, will pave the way for regulatory acceptance of nonanimal testing methods for respiratory sensitization in all 34 OECD member countries.
Educating Regulators

The adoption of nonanimal tests depends upon regulators understanding how the new tests are conducted and accepting the data that come from them. In order to facilitate the adoption of humane alternatives, PCRM takes every opportunity to educate regulators about the latest advances in chemical safety testing work. In California, pesticides cannot be applied to crops without approval from the California Environmental Protection Agency (Cal/EPA), which is charged with enforcing the state’s environmental protection laws. Even when the federal EPA approves a pesticide for use, California can prohibit it or require additional tests. Given that California is such an important agricultural market, Cal/EPA is extremely influential in determining which tests will allow a pesticide to be marketed. In order to advance nonanimal test methods, it is essential that California regulators understand these tests and how to interpret data derived from them.

In September, at the agency’s invitation, PCRM held a workshop at Cal/EPA to inform regulators about the NRC’s new approach to toxicity testing. The workshop provided a conceptual framework for future sessions that will educate regulators about how to practically apply this new approach in evaluating nonanimal test data in their daily work. The next workshop, scheduled for November, will focus on nonanimal tests for determining potential allergic skin reactions from exposure to a toxic chemical.

Promoting Preventive Medicine

Clinical Research

PCRM has demonstrated in clinical trials that a low-fat, plant-based diet can reverse the course of type 2 diabetes. In 2013, our clinical research staff conducted a 20-week pilot study on the effects of dietary changes on diabetic neuropathy, a painful, often-debilitating complication of diabetes that is not easily treatable with medication.

This year, PCRM also repeated its 36-week clinical study on the effects of dietary changes on rheumatoid arthritis and migraine pain.

PCRM published two papers in the *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition* from our landmark GEICO workplace dietary intervention study, which was conducted at 10 GEICO worksites across the country in 2011. Participants in the four-month study lost weight, lowered their cholesterol levels, and improved their blood sugar control.
In response to a recent recommendation by the American Academy of Pediatrics that infants as young as six months be fed red meat to prevent iron deficiency, PCRM physician Ulka Agarwal, M.D., published an article on the subject in *Infant, Child, & Adolescent Nutrition*. Dr. Agarwal asserted that the consumption of red meat does not guard against iron deficiency and anemia. Rather, feeding infants plant-based, iron-rich foods such as green leafy vegetables, legumes, and whole grains provides sufficient iron and in a form that can be easily metabolized. Relying upon plant foods as the source of iron also positions children for a healthier life and reduces their risk of developing diseases associated with the consumption of red meat, including cancer, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes.

**Food for Life**

PCRM’s Food for Life (FFL) program continues to thrive. We now have 134 instructors in 42 states and the District of Columbia offering plant-based nutrition classes, as well as 84 Educational Alliance Partners in 13 countries.

Building upon our past success working with GEICO employees nationwide, PCRM offered our corporate wellness program in 22 workplace settings, including three government agencies and two Fortune 500 companies. Employees had the opportunity to attend weekly “lunch and learn” meetings that included cooking demonstrations and samples of vegan dishes. FFL instructors also worked with the employer’s food service personnel to create plant-based menu options and provided employers with resources to encourage employee participation.

**21-Day Kickstart**

This year, PCRM ramped up efforts to help people across the globe transition to a plant-based diet through our online 21-Day Kickstart program. We now offer all versions of Kickstart – U.S., Indian, Spanish, and Chinese (in Mandarin) – monthly. To date, almost 400,000 people have participated in the program. We have also created a dedicated website for a modified version of the program in Japanese. In 2013, we added an online health tracker that allows participants to reach their health goals by monitoring weight, cholesterol, triglycerides, waist circumference, and A1c and blood glucose.

The Shanghai Veggie Club helped us promote Kickstart China by offering meet-up opportunities and incentives for participants. We also launched a new blog in Mandarin that covers breaking news about the health benefits of a plant-based diet, as well as videos and illustrated, step-by-step instructions on how to prepare recipes.

Bollywood actress Jacqueline Fernandez and fashion designer Anita Dongre signed on to help publicize Kickstart India, which includes new recipes and cooking videos. Our Kickstart Spanish resources page has gone viral, with more than 12,000 hits in one day.
Fighting the Diabetes Epidemic

PCRM continues its outreach into Native American communities, which are among the hardest hit by type 2 diabetes. We are now creating a documentary featuring the stories of Native Americans who have reclaimed their health through the Food for Life program and an instructional video that includes cooking demonstrations. The DVD will be distributed free of charge to Native Americans and health care providers engaged with Native communities.

PCRM has worked closely with nutritionists of the Navajo Nation to support efforts to educate their communities about the effectiveness of a plant-based diet in managing diabetes. In August, Dr. Barnard presented a community lecture, Nutrition and the Brain, for Navajo Division of Health staff and the community in Window Rock, Ariz. PCRM is also working with Native American Television to bring our message of good health to a wider audience.

The Five Worst Children’s Hospital Food Environments

Media interest in our 2012 exposé of unhealthy foods served at children’s hospitals culminated in a segment on ABC’s Nightline this April, which featured PCRM’s director of nutrition education, Susan Levin, M.S., R.D. Nightline producers targeted Shands Hospital in Florida, a top children’s hospital for heart surgery and one of our picks for worst offenders. Shands’ patient menu includes artery-clogging meatloaf with gravy, a ham-and-cheese croissant, and beef lasagna. At least five fast-food outlets at Shands serve foods loaded with cholesterol and saturated fat.

Five Worst Fast-Food Secret Menu Items

In March, PCRM published our report on the common practice among certain fast-food chains of posting off-menu items on their website or allowing customers to customize menu offerings (PCRM.org/SecretMenu). In so doing, the companies avoid complying with regulations requiring them to list the nutritional content of these foods. PCRM dietitians collected data from restaurant websites and other sources to conduct a nutritional analysis of some of the worst offenders, such as McDonald’s Monster Mac, which contains 1,390 calories, 2,920 milligrams of sodium, and 92 grams of fat. A study published last year in the Canadian Journal of Cardiology found that damage to arteries occurs almost immediately after one junk-food meal. Study participants consumed just one meal with 15 grams of saturated fat.
Warning: Contaminated Chicken

This summer, PCRM built upon our 2012 report on the widespread contamination of chicken products with fecal matter (FecalSoup.org), which occurs while killing and processing the birds. Some slaughter lines process as many as 140 birds per minute, allowing inspectors minimal time to examine each carcass for visible feces. In PCRM’s nationwide study of 15 grocery store chains, we found that 48 percent of chicken products tested positive for the presence of fecal bacteria, which cannot be destroyed by cooking. This year, we obtained a USDA training video that shows chickens can soak in fecal-contaminated water for up to an hour before being packaged for consumers.

Rather than strengthen inspections, the USDA has proposed new guidelines that would decrease the number of federal inspectors on inspection lines from four to one, increase the number of chickens inspected from 140 to 175 per minute, and advocate for the use of antimicrobials to treat contaminated chicken.

Labeling regulations for chicken mislead consumers into believing that the meat has been fully inspected and determined to be “wholesome.” This year, PCRM petitioned the USDA to be more transparent in its labeling so that Americans, who eat an average of 84 pounds of the meat per year, can decide for themselves how appetizing chicken would be with full disclosure of its health risks.

In early July 2013, PCRM unveiled a billboard in Arkansas, home of Tyson Foods, one of the world’s largest producers of chicken, pork, and beef, and pitched the story to the press, warning consumers of the presence of fecal contamination.

PCRM also issued a second report this summer on other contaminants commonly found in chicken including antibiotic-resistant “superbugs” and arsenic. In addition to contaminants related to processing, chicken products naturally contain carcinogens triggered through cooking and nearly as much cholesterol as red meat.
Dietary Guidelines for Alzheimer’s Prevention

In July, PCRM hosted the International Conference on Nutrition and the Brain, along with The George Washington University in Washington, D.C. Nearly 550 health care professionals attended the conference to learn how to reduce the risk of Alzheimer’s disease and promote brain health in their clinical practices.

During the conference, PCRM announced new Dietary Guidelines for Alzheimer’s Prevention developed in concert with an international panel of brain researchers. The guidelines recommend brain-healthy habits that are very similar to the habits that prevent heart disease: avoiding the saturated and trans fats found in meats, dairy products, and snack foods; basing the diet on plant-based foods; adding healthful sources of vitamin E; and others. Combining this diet with physical exercise and avoiding excess metals — such as iron and copper in multivitamins — can maximize protection for the brain.

The guidelines were covered by major media outlets throughout the United States and internationally. Dr. Barnard appeared on The Dr. Oz Show, The Ellen Show, Anderson Live, and Access Hollywood, among other programs, to discuss them. Videos of the conference’s presentations will soon be available at NutritionCME.org.

In August, PCRM issued a follow-up report, Metals of Concern in Common Multivitamins. Because most people already obtain sufficient amounts of copper and iron from everyday foods, the added amounts in multivitamins increase the risk of dementia. PCRM has asked the FDA to call on supplement manufacturers to remove these metals from multivitamins.