The Honorable Buck McKeon
U.S. House of Representatives
2184 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Adam Smith
U.S. House of Representatives
2402 Rayburn HOB
Washington, DC 20515

November 11, 2011

Dear Chairman McKeon and Ranking Member Smith:

As former military medical professionals, we are writing on this Veterans Day to urge you to take action on an issue crucial to the safety of the brave men and women who wear the uniforms of the U.S. military. We were pleased to learn that the Army recently agreed to end the use of live monkeys in chemical casualty management courses and is switching to more modern, effective methods. Now, we hope you will urge the Department of Defense to also replace its use of live animals in combat trauma training courses.

Service members currently learn to treat battlefield injuries by practicing on live pigs and goats. This ineffective and outdated methodology is known as "live tissue" training. A bill to rectify this situation, known as the BEST Practices Act (H.R. 1417), has been introduced and referred to the House Armed Services Committee. The bill would phase out the use of live pigs and goats in favor of superior, human-relevant methods such as medical simulators. As chair and ranking member of this committee, you are in prime positions to move this bill forward. We encourage you to work to turn the BEST Practices Act into law as quickly as possible.

In combat trauma training courses, live pigs and goats are subjected to serious injuries intended to replicate the most common causes of preventable battlefield fatalities, while trainees learn the procedures to treat their wounds. In some courses, animals are shot at point-blank range, and trainees are required to keep them alive as long as possible. In other courses, animals' limbs are amputated. At the end of each course, the animals are killed. This type of training is ineffective and inhumane, and human-relevant methods such as medical simulators would provide better training while avoiding animal suffering.

The emergency trauma skills taught in these courses are nearly identical to those taught in the equivalent course for civilian physicians, known as Advanced Trauma Life Support (ATLS). In ATLS courses, physicians learn to stop bleeding, create emergency airways, and manage collapsed lungs. While animals were once used in these courses, over the past decade, more than 98 percent of ATLS courses have switched to using only medical simulation and other human-relevant methods. It is now conventional wisdom in the medical field that simulation is a superior methodology for teaching trauma skills.

Simulators more closely replicate human anatomy and offer the trainees the opportunity to repeat procedures over and over again until they get them right. One simulation device, the [Cut Suit, by Strategic Operations, Inc.,](#) was specifically designed for combat trauma training and can teach extremity tourniquet application, extremity arterial hemorrhage clamping, surgical incisions to the thoracic and abdominal cavity, hemorrhage control of gross organ structure, and suturing or stapling of gross organs and skin. Compared to live tissue training, the Cut Suit more closely replicates the experience of treating a wounded human soldier. Meanwhile, there is no scientific or medical evidence that "live tissue" training is superior. It is time for the Department of Defense to make this change.

The Department of Defense may tell you that "live tissue" training is a vital part of the training that medical personnel receive before deploying to a war zone, but the facts do not bear this out. It's not just that civilian trauma training courses have moved decisively away from animal use—there are also U.S. military bases that favor human-relevant methods. For example, Marines deploying from Camp Schwab in Okinawa, Japan, do not train on any live animals, instead relying on "lifelike, robotic mannequins," many of which have been specifically designed for military training.

On Veterans Day, we give thanks to our fellow service members who have given their lives to this country. It is our responsibility to make sure that those currently serving overseas have the best chance of survival and success in their missions. Passage of the BEST Practices Act will ensure that those troops receive the most modern and effective training methods available. We urge you to pass this bill.
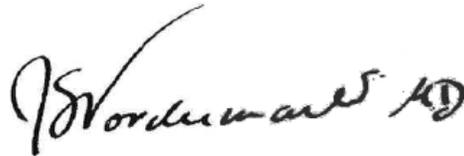
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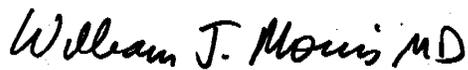
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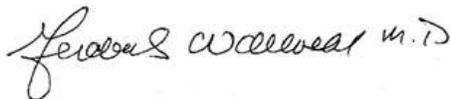LCDR, Medical Corps, USN (Ret.)
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