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NIH Affirms Support for NHP Studies, Efforts to Strengthen Research Rigor, Reproducibility

By Theresa Defino

At the conclusion of a two-day workshop on ways to improve studies involving non-human primates, NIH officials confirmed their commitment to funding NHP research and ensuring it is of the highest scientific quality.

Titled “Fostering Rigorous Research: Lessons Learned from Non-human Primate Models and Charting the Path Forward,” the workshop featured speakers from Harvard, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), New York University and Oregon Health & Science University, among others.^[1]

“NHPs have obviously shown their promise in serving for models for both basic human biology and for complex disease and disorders, and they are vital in our discovery of new cures and treatments,” said Lyric Jorgenson, deputy director of the NIH Office of Science Policy, which hosted the meeting. “We’ve discussed a lot of opportunities that are particularly unique to NHPs,” she said at the conclusion of the workshop.

She noted that NIH’s goal is “maximizing the value of non-human primate research and [the] nation’s investment in biomedical research,” while upholding the public’s trust and being good stewards of research dollars.

“We’re confident that the current set of regulations and the processes around animal research are robust and that the animals are well cared for, and that, in combination with our system for ensuring the scientific merit of what we do, is something we are confident and proud of, and will continue to invest in,” Jorgensen said.

U.S.-Funded Chimp Research Was Phased Out

In 2013, NIH announced it would cease funding most chimpanzee research, due to opposition from animal rights groups and a finding of an Institute of Medicine report that most of the “current use of chimpanzees in biomedical research [was] unnecessary.”^[2]

Since then, the agency has been implementing a phased retirement for chimpanzees it owns as space becomes available in a federal sanctuary. In some cases, however, the chimps have proven to be too aged or infirm to be moved and are being retired at or near their research facilities.

But NIH and other funders have continued to support research involving NHPs, such as monkeys, baboons, capuchins, macaques, and tamarins.

“NIH is invested in supporting research of non-human primates,” said Jorgensen, and “we’ll continue to do so, keeping this pro-active lens of ensuring rigorous and well-conducted science.”

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