Investigation of charges against UW-Madison by PETA.

On 12 September 2012, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), an animal rights organization, filed complaints with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the National Institutes of Health Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare (OLAW) about studies conducted at University of Wisconsin-Madison involving a cat. The complaints were reviewed by multiple individuals, including research animal veterinarians, and all of PETA's claims were found to be unsubstantiated, as documented below.

1) *PETA alleges that the University of Wisconsin-Madison did not ensure procedures minimized discomfort, distress and pain. To support the allegation, PETA states that the animal "was subjected to several invasive surgeries on the eyes, ears and brain. As a result of these multiple surgeries, the animal's health rapidly deteriorated."*

    a) In this case, the cat had two surgeries: one for cochlear implants, a surgery commonly performed in deaf humans to restore hearing; and a second to place a device on her head to keep recording instruments stable. After both surgeries, the animal was given pain medication and monitored closely to be sure the medication was working.
    b) Throughout the study, the animal ate and drank normally, produced normal urine and feces, and was bright, alert and active. This indicates she was generally in good health. When any device extends through the skin, such as head posts in humans designed to stabilize the neck after trauma, the surrounding skin remains susceptible to infection. This must be diagnosed and treated in both animal and human patients. In this case, appropriate veterinary care was provided at all times, and the cat's health was closely attended to, as documented in the clinical record.

2) *PETA alleges that there was a "neurological sign," and implies that this issues was unaddressed.*

    In this case, the mild neurological sign was twitching of the animal's ears. Clinical records from an hour-and-a-half later clearly state that it was resolved simply by turning down the volume on a hearing-aid-like-device.

3) *PETA alleges, "More than three months after her surgery, the records describe the cat's wound as "open, moist w/ bloody purulent discharge [with] moderate swelling." Even after this observation [of the head wound never healing] the cat was still used in an invasive procedure where a recording chamber was implanted into the head and electrodes were inserted into the brain."*

    As noted in the medical records, the discharge from the incision was diagnosed and treated within two hours. Neither a recording chamber nor electrodes were inserted into the cat's head or brain at any time. The 'electrodes' referred to were surface electrodes placed on the skin of the neck and shoulder area for an Auditory Brainstem Response (ABR) procedure. The same auditory test is routinely performed on human

newborns, and is harmless and painless. Since the infection did not cause generalized illness in the cat, it would not interfere with the research.

4) *PETA alleges that a bacterial infection developed in the surgical wound starting on or about Oct. 22, 2008, but that despite this, researchers continued to use the animal for several weeks. The records indicate that the infection was never brought under control and one of the last entries in [the cat's] records states that the cat "appear[ed]...depressed."*

   PETA offers a misleadingly edited version of the clinical record. The complete entry states that the "animal appears slightly depressed today" during a morning observation. PETA failed to point out that the record states the cat was bright, alert, and responsive by that same afternoon, and bright, alert, and responsive the previous day. Furthermore, for both humane reasons and to follow the principles of the "3 R's" (reduction, refinement, and replacement) due diligence was exercised to eliminate the need to replace the animal with another. There was a continuous and extensive effort to diagnose, treat and manage the condition that took place throughout the fall of 2008.

5) *PETA alleges that the cat was not euthanized when experiencing severe or chronic pain or distress.*

   The written record supports the fact that appropriate veterinary care and treatment was utilized to minimize discomfort, distress, and pain, and that when deemed appropriate, the animal was humanely euthanized. Veterinary-recognized clinical signs and symptoms of pain and distress were not observed in the cat. The clinical records show the cat continued to eat, drink and behave normally. A localized chronic infection did occur and was treated. When treatment efforts were deemed ineffective, the decision was made to humanely euthanize the animal in early December of 2008.

6) *PETA alleges that the investigator did not justify the number of animals needed for the experiments.*

   a) Contrary to PETA's claim, the numbers of animals requested and approved in the protocol was 30 over a 3-year period, not 30 per year.
   b) PETA complains that there is no scientific or statistical basis for the numbers of animals approved, but rather the numbers were justified by the researcher as being the number of animals needed to successfully publish research papers. In fact, the researcher provided a detailed scientific justification of animal number based on the numbers of brain cells needed to do he research, and correlated this to the number of animals required. The oversight committee, the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), accepted this description. It should be noted that, before any scientific paper is published, other scientists in the same field critically scrutinize it; this process holds researchers to very high standards and is a worthy yardstick with which to measure scientific research.
   c) PETA claims that since the IACUC approved the requested number of animals, then the committee must not be following the law. The USDA and other regulators

provide no specific guidance about how to justify animal numbers. The committee routinely applies the "3Rs" (reduction, refinement, and replacement) to guide their deliberations on animal numbers. In the case of this work, the investigator applied the 3Rs, and significantly reduced the numbers of animals requested compared to earlier studies.

7) *PETA alleges the investigator did not consider alternatives to the use of animals.*

In the approved protocol, the researcher describes in detail why non-animal alternatives and other animal models cannot be used to address the scientific question in play. The justification is logical and appropriate in the context of the specialized nature of this work aimed at helping deaf people hear. Suggestions for alternatives offered by PETA could not answer the specific questions being asked by the investigator, and therefore are not considered valid alternatives. One research objective is to obtain sufficient data to build a computer model that would mitigate the use of animal models for this type of research.

8) *UW-Madison did not ensure that a significant change to the protocol was reviewed by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC)*.

PETA claims a surgery was performed using unapproved anesthesia medications. The procedure they refer to is the ABR, which is not a surgery. The anesthesia medications used for this ABR were appropriate and as described in the protocol.

9) *PETA alleges that the cat was not observed on a daily basis.*

Every animal is observed every day by animal care staff and/or veterinary staff. Animal care staff maintains daily logs of those animal checks, and contact veterinarians if they notice anything abnormal. PETA examined medical records, not daily logs. Physicians don't visit their patients when they are not sick, nor do veterinarians clinically examine an animal every day unless there is a health reason to do so.

10) *PETA alleges veterinarians did not provide guidance to the investigator regarding the care and use of animals, as evidenced by four examples of anesthesia wearing off in cats undergoing highly invasive surgeries, or not being administered at all.*

a) Two of the four examples cited were actually not highly invasive surgeries, but rather the same Auditory Brainstem Response tests described earlier. ABR tests are commonly performed on newborn human infants. A light level of anesthesia is preferred, and was administered as described in the approved protocol, so the assertion by PETA that these instances reflect inadequate care is incorrect.
b) In a third case, PETA claims that during a surgery fluid began filling the animal's lungs, the animal stopped breathing, and that if the proper tube (endotracheal tube) had been used the fluid would not have accumulated. They also claim the cat woke up during surgery, because its anesthetic gas was disconnected so the fluid could be removed. In this surgery, the records show that the animal was intubated before the

surgery started. There was fluid accumulation inside the tube, which affected the cat's breathing, and required brief removal of anesthetic so that the tube could be cleared. There was no fluid in the lungs. The depth of anesthesia may have become lighter while the anesthetic gas was disconnected, but the record indicates that the cat remained asleep for the duration of the surgery.

c) In a fourth case, PETA claims that an anesthetic mask was improperly used. The PETA investigator who reviewed the records must not have noticed the entries stating that a tube was placed in the trachea at the beginning of that procedure, and not removed until the animal was recovering from the procedure. Even if a mask was momentarily used to assist with the anesthetic gas being delivered through the tube, the mask was never a primary method for delivering anesthesia, and the animal was fully anesthetized during the entire procedure. Just as in human surgery, the heart rate of the patient is carefully monitored and if the patient is "getting light" or "waking up" the heart rate will go up. In this case, when the "mask" comment was written in the record, the heart rate remained low.