

Dear Editor,

**Re: Erciyes University Faculty of Medicine,
XVI. Gevher Nesibe Medical Days,
1st Congress and Workshop of
Clinical and Experimental Research,
18-21 May 1998, Kayseri, Turkey**

Laboratory Animal Science in Turkey

My comments are based on 4 days of discussion and assessing practical competence of 192 people passing through our workshops and therefore cannot constitute a comprehensive review, more an impression.

I was most impressed by the efforts of Erciyes University to establish itself in this area, clearly you have a very well motivated and determined staff, my impression is that Erciyes is now firmly in pole position with its new facility and the credibility gained from the Conference, it will be most important to build on this quickly if you decide this is an appropriate development for your University.

Turkey has a long way to go to catch up with much of Central Europe and North America, I believe the time has come for Turkey to decide, either, animal based research is not to be encouraged, or that a sustained investment and training programme be instituted without delay, with the realisation that nationally this could lead to some of Turkey's most able medical and scientific people taking up overseas appointments to the detriment of Turkey.

Facilities:

The facilities at Erciyes University were good and should be capable of supporting quality scientific enquiry, though I would be interested to see how reliable the environmental controls prove to be in the height of summer and the depths of winter, this would be crucial to the execution of reliable and reproducible chronic studies. There does however need to be investment in animal caging, all the animals we saw were kept in overcrowded conditions falling well below the minimum standards required by the European Convention. Overcrowding, apart from the psychological damage to the animals poses a real threat of infectious disease and questions the validity of any scientific data obtained from such animals. New caging is expensive, there is a market in good quality secondhand caging in the UK following several mergers and takeovers in the pharmaceutical sector, whether, after taking shipping costs into account this would prove

advantageous I couldn't say without further enquiry.

People:

I left Turkey with the firm belief that its people are its greatest asset, all extremely keen to learn new techniques.

The scientists I spoke with seemed very committed to their subject areas and in some cases were already experienced researchers with published scientific papers. I would not believe that you have any problems with the ability of the people at this level, international collaboration is the norm at this level anyway and there are numerous opportunities for their personal development.

The area that gave me considerable concern was at the intermediate level, there clearly is not a structure for the development and training of animal care and technical staff, this need must be addressed urgently. Animal care staff should be recruited from a section of society who are reasonably well educated with average intelligence, but not necessarily to degree standart. Initially an interchange between the UK or other European centres would be essential before sufficient numbers of trained people would be available to institute a domestic training programme. There may be access to small amounts of external funding for this purpose. Without well trained care and technical staff there would be little prospect of Turkey making significant progress in biomedical research.

The workshops we ran exposed the lack of knowledge and training among the vast majority of participants, however on the positive side, there was a hunger for this knowledge and a determination to make the most of the workshop time by all who attended. I cannot recall having ever experienced such enthusiasm.

It is essential that all the people involved in the use of animals in science form a national organisation to disseminate information and transfer skills. The national organisation rooted at Erciyes should encourage the formation of area branches where people could meet perhaps one evening a month, with speakers and discussion forums on pertinent matters. A monthly newsletter covering different aspects of animal technology could be distributed with the membership encouraged to contribute. Eventually it could produce its own scientific journal as do most of the other European organisations.

Once established the organisation could join the Federation of European Laboratory Animal Science

Associations (FELASA) and benefit from the much wider context and the tri-annual meeting. In the meantime it would be sensible for people where possible to come to the UK and attend meetings such as the annual congresses of the Institute of Animal Technology and that of the Laboratory Animal Science Association (LASA). FELASA will hold their next meeting in Majorca, Spain in 1999; perhaps it could be Turkey in 2002, who knows?

I would suggest that if the meeting in 2000 goes ahead in Kayseri that a morning should be given over to talks on the establishment of training programmes for all categories of staff (FELASA have published guidelines on the content of such programmes). There are available some excellent speakers in the UK with many years experience in this field (we first started providing these vocational courses back in 1950 through the Institute of Animal Technology) and have constantly been reviewing and updating them since.

The Royal Veterinary College offers a masters degree and a diploma in laboratory animal science, for veterinary surgeons specialising in this field, perhaps your veterinary faculty could develop such a course. A less academically demanding course could also be offered either in the evenings outside normal working hours or by distance learning methods for people specialising in animal technology.

Education/training resources:

There is a shortage of specific educational material in Turkey, there are many excellent books and journals in this field, again perhaps your University could fund some of its training activities by setting up a resource centre of books and audio visual aids for sale throughout Turkey. We can certainly help with recommendations etc.. I would also suggest you take out institutional membership of LASA which publishes 4 journals per annum and also the American Association of Laboratory Animal Science (AALAS) which I personally believe (because of the sheer size of the country) produces some of the finest journal articles in this field 6 times per annum, and has incredible resources and holds a very impressive annual meeting attended by 4000 delegates.

I believe that it is unreasonable to expect significant progress on a national scale in a period of less than 5-10 years, though local pockets of excellence could be created

in a 2-3 year time span through international collaboration and an intensive training programme.

Animals:

Little can be done to improve the quality of the laboratory animals without the provision of trained care staff as discussed above. The animals used in our recent workshop were of poor quality and of little scientific value. Once demand for quality animals increases I'm sure the multi-national animal suppliers will be queuing to serve Turkey's needs, until that time it may be necessary for institutions to initiate limited breeding programmes and create an internal co-operative market.

Legislation:

As a minimum the European Convention should be embraced by the scientific community as an opportunity to drive up standards and release government funding to help meet these standards. The scientific community should reach a consensus on how the European Convention could best be incorporated into national legislation with the minimum of inconvenience to themselves and then for them to convince the politicians their proposals conform to the Convention without being injurious to biomedical research in Turkey. This approach would be far better than the legislation emanating from politicians with no real knowledge of the subject, and who may be influenced by the distortions of the animal rights movements, or worse still based on a system imported hastily from Europe which did not have a true Turkish dimension.

It would seem inconceivable that there would be significant external investment in Turkey by the multi-national pharmaceuticals if such minimal legislation wasn't in place. Turkey will be a growth area for the sale of pharmaceutical products and many of the companies would probably be more than happy to fund the research ambitions of medical practitioners who have helped with clinical trials and introduced their drugs into the university hospital.

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