

Survey shows most Canadian universities no longer use live animal laboratories in medical school curricula

A recent survey conducted by the international health advocacy organization Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM) shows that 11 of the 16 medical universities in Canada no longer use live animals in their teaching curricula.

PCRM asked the Canadian universities if they have live animal laboratories in their medical school curricula. The University of British Columbia replied that it uses about 25 live pigs each year in its undergraduate medical program. Memorial University of Newfoundland also uses pigs, and the University of Western Ontario in London still uses live animals in the classroom, but would not comment on what species of animals are used or how many. Queen's University in Ontario and Université Laval in Montreal refused to answer PCRM's survey. The other 11 universities responded that they do not use live animal laboratories.

Jerry Vlasak, MD, a PCRM spokesperson, is pleased with the survey results. "Although some universities are holding onto live animal laboratories, this survey shows that most medical schools are no longer tolerating the use of live animals in the classroom. Most schools now use alternative teaching methods, and the continuing movement in this direction is strong."

Since 1985, PCRM has been tracking the use of live animal laboratories in universities in the United States. Only 34 of the 126 medical universities in the United States continue to use live animals in the classroom. At 33 of the schools still using live animals, students may choose not to participate in a live animal lab and may or may not be offered an alternative. Only one school requires that students participate in animal laboratories.

The use of live animal laboratories as a teaching method is outmoded, expensive, and raises ethical concerns. PCRM advocates state-of-the-art alternatives to animal laboratories, such as interactive CD-ROMS, videos, lifelike simulators, and additional or increased clinical experience.

Founded in 1985, PCRM is a national health organization dedicated to promoting preventive medicine and higher standards in medical research, education, and practice.

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