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# **Funding animal research:** **communications guidelines for charities**

**Published by the RDS Resource Centre  
with the Association of Medical Research Charities**

## Writing for *The Sunday Telegraph*, Tony Blair explains why it is time for the silent majority to act against animal rights protesters who hinder medical research



14 May 2006

“ ... It is research which has helped hundreds of millions of people through vaccines to eradicate mass killers such as smallpox and medicines and procedures to treat incurable conditions like heart complaints. Research, too, which holds out the hope in tandem with other scientific advances such as genetic modification of extraordinary breakthroughs in treating and preventing diseases as varied as cancer, muscular dystrophy and Alzheimer's.

British scientists and companies, as in the past, are at the forefront of this work. They continue to make a huge contribution to human health and well-being as well as creating thousands of highly skilled jobs in the UK. Only the United States has a more successful bio-science sector than Britain. They deserve our thanks, support and protection....

....The extremist and criminal behaviour is not new, nor is it restricted to Britain. What is new are the increased efforts by Government, the police and the courts to stamp out this illegal and sometimes violent conduct. New powers brought in last year to counter the threat from animal rights extremists, better co-ordination and the establishment of a specialist police unit has led to an increase in arrests and a welcome reduction in incidents. The tough penalties handed down by the courts to those behind the campaign of terror against the Hall family show how seriously this is now being taken....

....But, crucially, we are now seeing a change in public attitudes as well as the law. We are now seeing very welcome signs of both individuals and firms being ready to stand up publicly to intimidation and making clear this tiny extremist fringe is out of touch with public opinion....

....Hundreds of millions of people in the UK and around the world today are alive and healthy because of the pioneering work of our scientists and researchers. Many millions more will be spared an early death or a life of pain because of the research now under way. They deserve our support. And they should get it...

”

## Funding animal research: Communications guidelines for charities

**M**edical research charities have long been involved in the debate about animal research. In 1991 a number of charities came together to form the Research for Health Charities Group to combat the increasingly professional lobbying by antivivisection groups. These were running campaigns against medical research charities and generating public and political hostility to animal research. The Group later amalgamated with the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC), which now takes the lead in the charity sector for this issue.

Historically, there has been understandable concern within charities about attracting harassment from animal rights extremists. However, we have recently been through the worst decade ever for animal rights extremism, and yet almost the entire charity sector has been unaffected. Furthermore, in the last few years, there has been an astonishing turnaround in fortunes in the debate about animal research, and the fight-back against the extremists:

- There is more positive media coverage about animal research and greater sympathy for researchers, research institutes and their funders.
- The government and police have taken serious measures to tackle animal rights extremism, which is now declining rapidly.
- The whole research sector has become increasingly outspoken and effective at conveying the message about why animal research is necessary.
- More people are willing to speak up about animal research than ever before, including patients linked to charities and members of the public.

- We have strength in numbers. For example, over 150 organisations have now posted statements on their websites explaining the need for carefully regulated animal research. This includes many medical research charities.

- A large number of initiatives have captured the public imagination and illustrated overwhelming public support for the use of animals in medical research. These have ranged from the Declaration on Animals in Medical Research, signed by more than 700 leading scientists and doctors, to the Pro-Test rallies in Oxford, and the People's Petition.

- Organisations that have communicated carefully have not become extremist targets: on the contrary, the more institutions that are transparent, the less likely it is that any one will be singled out. The extremists simply cannot target everyone at once.

- Because animal rights extremists focus heavily on a few well-known targets, only a small number of research institutes are troubled at any one time. The extremists are very small in number, spread thinly, and very few individuals are now targets of harassment and intimidation.

- The current political climate is extremely positive, with the Prime Minister, the government, and senior opposition figures openly supportive of animal research. The government has come up with additional measures to deal with extremism, including new legislation to restrict extremists' activities. They are under considerable police pressure and their activity is declining steadily.

PICTURES FROM FIRST PRO-TEST RALLY  
IN OXFORD COURTESY OF PVMA



### THE PEOPLE'S PETITION

#### SUPPORTING MEDICAL RESEARCH IN THE UK

1

I BELIEVE THAT MEDICAL RESEARCH IS ESSENTIAL FOR DEVELOPING NEW MEDICAL AND VETERINARY TREATMENTS. I UNDERSTAND THAT FINDING SAFE AND EFFECTIVE TREATMENTS REQUIRES SOME STUDIES USING ANIMALS.

2

I BELIEVE THAT MEDICAL RESEARCH USING ANIMALS, CARRIED OUT TO THE HIGHEST STANDARDS OF CARE AND WELFARE, AND WHERE THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE AVAILABLE, SHOULD CONTINUE IN THE UK.

3

I BELIEVE THAT PEOPLE WHO CARRY OUT MEDICAL RESEARCH USING ANIMALS HAVE A RIGHT TO WORK AND LIVE WITHOUT FEAR OF INTIMIDATION OR ATTACK.

SIGN UP NOW

[www.thepeoplespetition.org.uk](http://www.thepeoplespetition.org.uk)

## Specific charity concerns

The fear of attracting unwanted attention from animal rights extremists has been a major factor inhibiting open communication among those who fund animal research – but there is no evidence of a link. There has been wide variation in openness of different charities over the past few years. Some have put statements on their website, run articles in their newsletters, or even put up staff or patients for media interviews. Yet this has never resulted in an extremist attack.

The experiences of AMRC and RDS indicate that it is possible to have a very high media and lobbying profile on the animals issue without fear of reprisal. Neither organisation has been targeted by extremists in recent years.

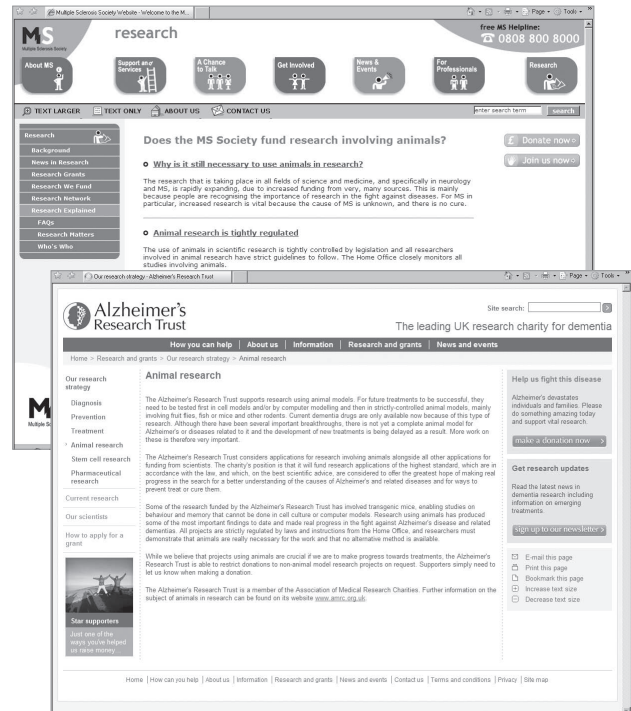
It is important to distinguish between lawful and peaceful campaigning by antivivisection groups against medical research charities, and criminal activity by extremists. Many antivivisectionists write letters, for example to local papers, condemning charity funding of animal research. This has led to an unwarranted fear of extremist activity.

In fact, only a very small number of charities have been targeted over many years. With very few exceptions, these are invariably the large, high-profile charities. Furthermore, this targeting has overwhelmingly caused distress or annoyance rather than damage or actual harm.

RDS does not underestimate the problems of animal rights extremism. We have put more effort into combating this problem than any other issue. If you have cause to be concerned, advice is available from RDS and AMRC at any time. You need only pick up the phone.

Another specific charity concern is that bad publicity will damage fundraising. We certainly do not suggest that the use of animals is an appropriate topic for fundraising copy, but many successful large or medium size charities have engaged openly about animal research without any impact at all on fundraising. Indeed, there is a converse risk that if you fail to explain why animal research is important, the antivivisectionists will reach your target fundraising audience and turn them against you.

Unfortunately, the reluctance of charities and others to make the case for animal research has meant that supportive members of the public, especially patients, have found it difficult to locate the relevant information. Many do wish to argue for animal research, and need to know the facts.



Charities should remember that antivivisection organisations regularly ask their supporters to write to medical research charities pretending that they are a donor. The antivivisectionist will threaten in the letter to stop making donations unless the charity ceases funding animal research. Extensive experience of several charities who have checked these letters against their supporters' databases has shown that virtually none are true donors.

It is certainly the case that charities occasionally lose corporate or other substantial donors because they support animal research. However, evidence suggests that this is the result of a failure to communicate. It would be extremely unwise not to admit to a corporate funder that you have an association with animal research. It is therefore imperative that the entire charity sector along with the rest of the scientific community educate the public, including all potential donors, about the need for animal research.

It may be helpful for charities to remember that there is already good information on the private member's area of the AMRC website about how to handle animal research problems. For example, there are sample letters on how to respond to persistent antivivisectionist letter writers.

It is also important to be realistic about the fact that you cannot hide your links to animal research. Virtually all medium and large charities which fund animal-based projects are already identified on antivivisection websites. There is no doubt, for example, that animal rights extremists are well aware of the major players, and could pick a new target at any time.



## Communications handbook

RDS has published a communications handbook to help research institutions, such as universities and research councils, feel more confident about their communications regarding the use of animals in scientific and medical research. In the handbook we:

1. Demonstrate that research institutions can be more proactive about explaining their use of animals in medical research without putting themselves in danger from animal rights extremists
2. Give general advice and guidelines on how to prepare and implement a communications strategy
3. Give general information and materials that can be used for Question and Answer sessions or briefings.

The recommendations in the handbook are aimed at research institutions, but may also be useful for charities, especially larger ones or those with their own linked institutes. Here, we distill some of the information included in the handbook. [Contact Corina Hadjiodyseos at RDS for the full-length version: email: \[corinah@rds-net.org.uk\]\(mailto:corinah@rds-net.org.uk\); tel: 020 7478 4333.](#)

## The new approach: greater openness about the use of animals in medical research

There is strong public support for the well-regulated use of animals in research. Being transparent about your involvement may enhance your reputation, as you will be seen to be open and honest.

Many research organisations, including medical research charities, are nervous about communicating on the animals issue. There are concerns that they will attract unwanted attention from animal rights extremists, face the glare of public and media scrutiny, or alienate their donor base. It does not have to be like that, and this document describes how to take the first basic steps forward. It is not about drawing special attention to where charities fund animal research, or about getting dragged into difficult debate. These guidelines should help you see constructive ways that you can help to defuse the tension that surrounds this issue and help present it as a small, but integral and vital part of medical progress for patient benefit.

## Why we need a new approach

In the past, most research institutions and funders chose to keep their heads ‘below the parapet’. The reasons given for this include: not wanting to draw

attention to an institution or put its work in jeopardy; and to fulfill an institution’s duty of care to protect its staff. In the case of charities, this sometimes includes shops where there is a genuine concern that these represent soft targets for animal rights campaigning.

However, ‘keeping your head down’ does not prevent animal rights extremists from finding out what they want to know – they have targeted (mostly large) charities, even when these have kept a low profile. If they choose to target you, it will be because you fit what they are looking for, not because of your communications activities. The extremists would find it very easy to pick a new charity target from the lists of charities that fund animal research which are posted on antivivisection websites.

Historically, the reluctance of the broader scientific community to make the public case for animal research worsened an already difficult situation. Until very recently, animal rights and antivivisection campaigners dominated media coverage, fuelling misconceptions about animal research. Meanwhile, research institutions have been perceived as secretive or defensive. This gives the appearance of having something to hide and arouses the suspicion, and sometimes hostility, of many groups including the media, MPs and the public.

Partly as a result, animal research has become increasingly difficult and expensive, because of the cost of security measures and compliance with excessively restrictive legislation. This is a serious concern to charities, especially given new structures for full cost-recovery.

By developing and implementing a communications strategy, funders and institutions may gain more public support, as they will demonstrate their willingness to be open on this issue and show that they have nothing to hide. This will help to foster a better climate for biomedical research and education and encourage government to continue to address and tackle the extremist threat.

## Objectives of communications

For a long time, the threat posed by a minority of extreme animal rights campaigners has coloured the overall debate concerning research using animals. There is real value for the entire medical research sector in encouraging greater openness and transparency, and the overall climate is now right to support charities to move this work forward. This does not mean radical change, but building confidence through careful and steady progress.

You can start with choosing your overall communications objectives which can include:

- Protecting and enhancing your charity's reputation, whilst minimising the potential for damage. This might relate to animal research in general, or to specific activities, such as when antivivisection groups run periodic campaigns against medical research charities
- Informing your supporter-base about the benefits of animal research, and gaining their support; especially patients, regular donors, and the sympathetic public
- Encouraging your peers and the government to acknowledge the benefits of animal research and tackle the extremist threat.

In addition, charities will find that researchers in universities will greatly appreciate the support of funding bodies. Universities are likewise trying to become more open, and need the support of funding bodies to achieve that.

If you decide to create such a strategy, you should identify your milestones, both short and long-term, and hence focus your activities to meet them. In the short-term it might be useful to focus on explaining the rationale, benefits and conduct of animal research. Once you're confident that you have laid the foundation you can then build on that and aim to present animal research as a normal and accepted part of wider scientific research efforts, albeit one which raises important ethical issues.

## Getting started

Identify the different audiences that you want to reach as well as what you want to achieve. Your target audiences could include:

### Staff

Ensure that they know your position of funding animal research, and provide information about projects where this plays a part. Help staff to see that being open about this is beneficial and low risk, for the reasons outlined above. Extend this work to Trustees, celebrity supporters etc.

### Donors

It is imperative that you do not appear to be 'hiding' anything from your existing and potential donors. Be open about the use of animals – stress the benefits of research which uses them as part of the overall research jigsaw. Your donors chose your charity because they are particularly concerned about the disease(s)/disorder(s) that your work tackles.

Prepare a basic information pack. Identify the benefits/insights that the research has already brought, and stress that this is part of research to understand and ultimately find a cure for conditions like Alzheimer's disease, stroke, cancer etc.

### Universities or other research institutions where you fund work

Find out who your key contact will be and work together to ensure consistency in messages and activi-



ties. Universities sometimes complain that charities ask them to avoid mentioning animals when publicising research. There is no rationale for this as a way of keeping charity-sector involvement in animal research 'under wraps'. Animal rights campaigners are adept at looking through published papers where funders are acknowledged.

### Patients

Provide information outlining the benefits of the work and keep it up-to-date (including important contributions and medical advances).

### MPs and other opinion formers

Invite small groups of key decision-makers to meet researchers who you fund, and see where they work, and to witness good animal welfare practices for themselves.

## Other national and international organisations, government and industry contacts

It is useful to discuss with others the tactics they have used and found successful or otherwise. There is also strength in numbers, so you can act together on a co-ordinated initiative. Once your audiences have been identified, we recommend that you adopt first the relatively safe activities that other research institutions have tried out already. The list starts with internal communications because it is important to make sure that your own staff are well briefed and supportive.

## Internal communications and actions

These will of course vary in scope and detail depending on different charities size and structure, but basic principles include:

1. Identify or set up a temporary advisory committee to be responsible for this issue. Meet at regular intervals (eg quarterly) and maintain communication on developments, actions, and issues of interest (such as media coverage, events etc).
2. Decide at a senior level, with your Board/Trustees and advisory committees, how you want to gain commitment and take forward communications on this issue.
3. Ensure those who feel nervous have an opportunity to air their concerns. Attempts to engage on the issue of animal research can generate resistance in some quarters. Explaining that the real risk is much lower than perceived helps to gain acceptance. For example, most research institutions were very nervous about posting statements on their websites, but many have now done so without problems. External speakers from RDS or AMRC can help. Talk to your peers one-to-one or at organised workshops.
4. Inform staff at job interviews or induction that your charity funds some animal research and ask them how they feel about that. Extend this induction to your celebrity supporters and patrons. The animal rights groups are already attempting to expose what they call the 'hypocrisy' of celebrities who support animal rights and charities funding animal research. You need to be sure that you get to your high profile supporters first, so that they know what you do.
5. In addition to induction that individual charities decide to undertake, the AMRC runs training sessions for charity staff, which include a visit to an animal lab.
6. Keep the issue high on your charity's agenda, by inviting an external speaker, eg from RDS, Coalition for Medical Progress (CMP) or AMRC to talk about the national debate about animal research and to explain why communication is important. These groups can help facilitate discussion on this topic and provide experience gained from other establishments.
7. Give reception staff, secretaries and other support staff training or information so they know to whom to direct enquiries.
8. Give information to those working at shops (where it applies) to use as a resource if asked by customers. AMRC has a generic leaflet that you can also adapt to your area if you chose.
9. Be familiar with any risk assessment for your institution. Communicate to your staff that all necessary measures have been taken to ensure their safety, and that more help and advice are available if desired.

## External communications and actions

Not all staff can be expected to have all the answers at their fingertips, but they should know where to go for information and what the policies are. It is good PR practice to have positive information ready to respond to predictable inquiries.

1. If you have not already done so, post a web statement explaining your institution's policy on animal research. Ensure the statement is kept up-to-date and relevant. The RDS communications handbook includes guidelines on what should be included in a web statement and you can also link to the AMRC statement: <http://www.amrc.org.uk/temp/StatementspspUsespofspAnimalsspFinalspMaysp2006.doc>.
2. When promoting research which you have funded, work with researchers to include appropriate information about the animal-related aspects of the work. This could be in press releases, on your website, in newsletters, annual reports and other publications.
3. Prepare information packs for different audiences (eg journalists, politicians) so they are ready if asked for. The packs can include Q&As, general information about the work which you fund, benefits of the research in general etc. Be clear about which animals are used by your researchers and the proportions/number (often grossly distorted by animal activists). These may take some time to agree and sign off, but creating them will also help focus thought. Organisations like RDS, CMP and AMRC can help with this material.

4. Understand the different ways that the media can impact on your charity. Develop policies for dealing with the media and make contact with local media outlets and individual journalists. Media work is exceptionally important, and is covered in a separate section of this document and in more detail in the RDS communications handbook.

5. Put together a list of scientists you fund who are willing to speak on your behalf. Encourage them to get media training and then 'mentor' others about speaking out. Young scientists make particularly good spokespeople as they can be very enthusiastic about their work, can be 'more attractive' to the media, and may be less sceptical or afraid of it than some more established scientists.

## Difficult issues

The following issues are unlikely to arise, but you should take them seriously. Seek advice quickly from the appropriate person within your organisation or from RDS or AMRC:

1. Allegations that you are funding cruel research at a particular institution, or a concern that you might be linked to some kind of exposé of mistreatment of animals.
2. A media reporter who seems to be snooping or fishing.

## Developing the messages

After deciding on your communications objectives, you can then begin developing your key messages to help achieve the desired goals with your target audiences. It is important to keep the messages simple and to the point. Most charities will have a research strategy which will clarify the context for the types of work they fund. Appropriate messages include:

- Research using animals is for human benefit, and helps animals too.
- Research using animals is conducted humanely and with great emphasis on animal welfare.
- Every effort is made to care for the animals and maintain high animal welfare standards. The principles of replacement, refinement, and reduction ('the 3Rs') guide research in the UK. This means that every effort is made to minimise the use of animals and develop alternatives. See Useful Links on the next page for an explanation of why the numbers of procedures are increasing despite the 3Rs.
- Your organisation recognises public concerns about animal research, and seeks an open debate.

The more detailed RDS communications handbook includes some information that can be used to support these messages.

## Working with the media

In the past, charities have rarely spoken openly in the media about their involvement in funding animal research.

Occasionally journalists will phone a charity press office simply because they have a phone number to hand. In such cases, journalists simply want someone to talk through the main arguments for using animals in research. It is perfectly acceptable to pass these sorts of queries to AMRC and RDS who are experienced in understanding the debate.

On the other hand, your charity is well placed to promote the research which it has funded. There are basic communications tools that can be prepared in advance. Identify, equip and train those who would be called upon to speak for you well in advance. Prepare information packs that you can use to brief the media. Variations of these packs can be used when briefing internal stakeholders (prior to meetings or interviews) as well as switchboard operators or receptionists who might become involved.

Appropriate Q&As can be prepared for the different scenarios.

**Cell transplant may restore lost sight**

**Common cold virus may be new weapon to fight cancer**

**Stem cell cure for diabetes**

**Muscular dystrophy breakthrough following tests on Italian dogs**

Scientists have shown that cells in the heart's outer layer can migrate deeper into a failing organ to carry out essential repairs.

The migration of progenitor cells is controlled by a protein called thymosin beta 4, already known to help reduce muscle cell loss after a heart attack.

The discovery opens up the possibility of using the protein to develop more effective treatments for heart disease.

The University College (UCL) study appears in *Nature*.

Human trials begin this year  
Scientists say move is 'exciting'

Atak Jha, science correspondent  
Thursday January 11, 2007  
The Guardian

British scientists are preparing to launch trials of a radical new way to fight cancer, which kills tumours by infection, then viruses like the

The key cells are a

The approach is one of the most promising to be examined in the first trials.

On October 10, 2006, the approach is one of the most promising to be examined in the first trials.

Home > News > World > Science & Technology  
4 January 2007 12:28

Scientists recreate Down's syndrome in mice

By Genevieve Roberts  
January 2007

Scientists have used mice to recreate Down's syndrome in mice in order to study how new treatments for people who have the genetic

ch Council hope it will help research into that and other

92 per cent of a copy of human chromosome 21, display

formation of the heart.

shed in the magazine *Science*, is a significant technical

study of the disease and other diseases that stem from

Down's syndrome affects almost one in 750

The National Institute for Medical Research, and

Fisher from the Institute of Neurology at University

place fragments of chromosomes into mouse cells, and no mouse had

displayed a heart disorder similar to Down's.



## Conclusion

By adopting a more proactive approach to communicating on this issue, medical research charities can help themselves in three key ways: they can minimise the risk posed to reputation by the antivivisectionists; gain public support for animal research; and help encourage the Government to continue to address the extremist threat. In addition, as more institutions become transparent, your openness and role in the debate may enhance your reputation as being honest and pragmatic about how treatments and cures are developed.

Legislation and security protect those involved in animal research, and the places where they work, but these alone will not maintain public support for the work. Those involved need to be prepared to explain what they do, why and how. We must create an environment in which everyone – from funders and donors

to patients and the public at large – feels confident the research being conducted on their behalf is necessary and humane. In turn, those who communicate will start to feel more supported and confident.

By working together, funders and research institutions can play a significant role and help illuminate the complex topic of animal research, its costs and its benefits to human and animal health. Careful communication will foster understanding and trust, non-communication will merely prolong opposition.

The Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC) takes the lead in the charity sector for speaking out about animal research. Seek advice from AMRC (Sophie Petit-Zeman; [s.petit-zeman@amrc.org.uk](mailto:s.petit-zeman@amrc.org.uk); 0207 269 8831) at any stage of your planning.

## Useful links

- AMRC statement on use of animals in medical research  
<http://www.amrc.org.uk/temp/Statements-spUsesofspAnimalsspFinalspMaysp2006.doc>
- Does animal testing work? Why does it still need to be used today?  
<http://www.rds-net.org.uk/>  
<http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/biomed/faq.shtml>
- Who is developing alternatives to using animals? Why can't we just use these instead?  
<http://www.nc3rs.org.uk/>
- Explains the legislation which requires the use of animals for safety testing  
<http://www.mhra.gov.uk/>  
(the MHRA 'How we regulate' webpage links to EU Directive 2001/83/EC which covers safety testing, while animal welfare is covered by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act) 1986
- How many animals are used in research and testing in the UK?  
<http://www.rds-net.org.uk/>  
<http://scienceandresearch.homeoffice.gov.uk/animal-research/publications/statistics/>
- Why is the number of animals used in research increasing if efforts are being made to reduce animal use?  
[http://www.rds-net.org.uk/pages/page.asp?i\\_ToolbarID=2&i\\_PageID=31](http://www.rds-net.org.uk/pages/page.asp?i_ToolbarID=2&i_PageID=31)
- Isn't cosmetics animal testing being phased out?  
<http://www.eceae.org/english/cosmetics.html>
- Science Media Centre: When animal research hits the headlines  
[http://www.sciencemediacentre.org/animal\\_research.htm](http://www.sciencemediacentre.org/animal_research.htm)
- Coalition for Medical Progress  
<http://www.medicalprogress.org>

Mice give hope of blindness cure ... Acne drug linked to depression in mice ... Stem cell experiment on rats offers hope for human stroke victims ... Sick zebrafish could hold key to leukaemia ... Bird flu: the front line .... Organs grown for spare parts within decade ... Secret of the mice that kill cancers .... Stem cell experts seek rabbit-human embryo ... First cloned rat will help work on human disease ... Heart attack victims to be given own stem cells .... Sperm targeting vaccine blocks male fertility in monkeys ... Tests raise hope of an AIDS cure .... Dog helps find cure for fatal muscle disease ... Scientists uncover clues into Crohn's disease .... Stem cell cure for diabetes ... Oxygen supply could be Alzheimer's factor ... Abortion pill may limit breast cancer .... Help for stroke patients ... Rat study helps scientists catch up with the Atkins diet ... Mice give hope of blindness cure ... Acne drug linked to depression in mice ... Stem cell experiment on rats offers hope for human stroke victims ... Sick zebrafish could hold key to leukaemia ... Bird flu: the front line .... Organs grown for spare parts within decade ... Secret of the mice that kill cancers .... Stem cell experts seek rabbit-human embryo ... First cloned rat will help work on human

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 **RDS**

Understanding Animal Research in Medicine

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