

It Is Time to Take a Stand for Medical Research and Against Terrorism Targeting Medical Scientists

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Terrorists are attacking scientists who are attempting to alleviate human suffering. We need a concerted public effort to eliminate these acts, particularly the harassment of scientists studying nonhuman primates. This need is highlighted by the attacks upon the home of our friend and colleague, the noted medical scientist, Dr. Edythe London, professor of psychiatry and biobehavioral sciences and of molecular and

medical pharmacology at the David Geffen School of Medicine at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). Her work exemplifies the unique role of research involving nonhuman primates in enabling the results of research in simple systems (oocytes, cell culture) and lower organisms to be applied to human diseases. The importance of Dr. London's research was highlighted in a public letter issued on February 8, 2008 from the

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Director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Dr. Elias Zerhouni, who stated, “her work is a prime example of NIH’s efforts ... to develop effective treatments for people suffering from addiction—a disease that devastates individuals, families, communities, and costs society more than half a trillion dollars annually in health and crime-related costs and losses in productivity.”

Dr. London suffered two attacks upon her home within 4 months that have escalated in their level of threat to her life and work. The first occurred on October 20, 2007, and it involved the flooding of her house with water. A press release from the Animal Liberation Front, a group that has publicized both attacks, noted that water was used for the initial act because “we don’t risk starting brush fires,” a serious public threat in Southern California. Nevertheless, in the second attack on February 5,

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2008, a Molotov cocktail firebomb was ignited, setting fire to Dr. London’s home. These crimes mirror other recent attacks on scientists conducting medical research involving animals, only a few of which we will mention here (1). In June 2006, another incendiary device intended for UCLA neuroscientist, Dr. Lynn Fairbanks, was placed on the doorstep of her 70-year-old neighbor. In June 2007, a third incendiary device was found at the home of another UCLA neuroscientist, Dr. Arthur Rosenbaum, the chief of pediatric ophthalmology at that institution. Dr. Rosenbaum’s wife also received a letter that included death threats and that was accompanied by razor blades and animal hair. Problems also have been escalating at the University of California Santa Cruz (UCSC). Most recently, on February 25, 2008, after a series of other incidents, six people broke into the home of a UCSC faculty member, whose name has not been released, and attacked a member of that faculty person’s family. The *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, on February 26, implicated a group of six people and a corporation, Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty USA. Threatening acts have occurred at other American medical research institutions, including the Oregon Health Sciences University and the University of Utah (1). The attacks in the United States follow a more vigorous program of terrorism in the United Kingdom aimed at disrupting medical research, particularly research involving nonhuman primates (2).

The attacks are horribly misguided. It is impossible to reconcile the willingness of these terrorists to harm humans, particularly people who are working to alleviate human suffering, with their contention that they value life of all kinds. Scientists, like Dr. London, care about the primates that they study. Scientists are partners with other interested groups in the ongoing international effort to improve the principles and practices governing animal research (briefly reviewed at <http://www.nabr.org/pdf/orange.pdf>). This peaceful and collaborative process is critical to preserve in the face of the recent violence.

We need to support our colleagues and to work to preserve the integrity of the mission of alleviating human suffering through biomedical research involving animals. In so doing, we might help to ensure that these attacks upon scientists do not discourage much-needed research by demoralizing scientists or by stimulating institutions to adopt overly burdensome administrative practices (2). The recent events at UCLA make clear that diligently improving the ethical standards for primate research procedures is not, by itself, sufficient to prevent attacks. It is encouraging, for example, that on February 22, 2008, a Los Angeles County Superior Court judge issued a restraining order against the Animal Liberation Brigade, the Animal Liberation Front, and UCLA Primate Freedom Project that created a protective buffer zone around the homes of UCLA research faculty members.

These terrorist acts might intimidate people and institutions that would otherwise speak out in support of nonhuman primate research and against terrorism. By failing to take public action, we contribute to the isolation of the scientists involved and the institutions in which they work. Frustration with the absence of a vigorous public response to recent terrorist attacks led Robert Palazzo, president of the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology in Bethesda, Maryland to ask “Where’s the noise on this?” (1). Several organizations, such as the Society for Neuroscience (<http://www.sfn.org>), the National Association for Biomedical Research (<http://www.nabr.org>), and the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology (<http://www.acnp.org>), are helping to educate the public on these issues. There are growing opportunities for animal research advocacy. The failure

to publicly address the crimes against its faculty was initially a problem at UCLA, but this institution now is at the vanguard of protecting its scientists and speaking out on behalf of medical research (1). In addition, the Society for Neuroscience has issued a report on “Best Practices for Protecting Researchers and Research” to assist investigators and institutions targeted by terrorists (http://www.sfn.org/skins/main/pdf/gpa/Best_Practices_for_Protecting.pdf).

We seek a more vigorous investigation and prosecution of the criminals committing the crimes against these scientists, their staffs, their families, their neighbors, and the communities in which they live. We are heartened that stronger laws enacted in the United States and the United Kingdom provide enforcement agencies with legal tools needed to bring these offenders to justice (1). The United Kingdom is ahead of the United States in this regard. As reported in *Science*, the United Kingdom formed a National Extremism Tactical Coordination Unit in 2004. This unit helped to conduct a 2-year investigation involving more than 700 police, which resulted in raids in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Belgium and the arrest of 30 suspected terrorists. There seem to be signs that the vigorous prosecution of terrorism in the United Kingdom is having a positive effect (3). However, the number of attacks on scientists conducting medical

research in animals in the United States is increasing (1), and we need to mount an equally vigorous campaign in this country to prevent these heinous attacks.

Lastly, we wish to laud the dedication and courage shown by Dr. London and those like her that continue to strive to reduce suffering and advance science despite obvious personal cost. As the beneficiaries of progress in medical care, it is also our responsibility to join the struggle to preserve medical research.

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Supplementary material cited in this article is available online.

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