



PETA

PEOPLE FOR THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT OF ANIMALS

501 FRONT ST.
NORFOLK, VA 23510
Tel. 757-622-PETA
Fax 757-622-0457

PETA.org
info@peta.org

January 7, 2004

Glenn Peterson
Associate Vice President for External Relations
Columbia University Medical Center
Health Sciences Division
2960 Broadway, PH 1-132
New York, NY 10027

Dear Mr. Peterson:

We have received many copies of the form response that you are sending out to the thousands of people who want Columbia to end its cruel and archaic experiments on animals. Not many people have asked us to get back to them about your letter because they can see it for what it is. Frequently, recipients of your letter forward it to us with something akin to “nonsense” written across the top.

But, for the record: You claim that Columbia launched an investigation when it became aware of the allegations of animal cruelty brought to the attention of its Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) and that the investigation has “already resulted in modifications to [Columbia’s] animal care program.”

The first complaint about animals not receiving proper veterinary care or euthanasia when they needed to be relieved of their suffering was made in October 2002. Yet, by January 2003 the university had done nothing. This is unconscionable. If the whistleblowing veterinarian could review animal records in her spare time and determine that there was a real and distinct failure on Columbia’s part to provide veterinary care to animals who had been hacked apart and mutilated in experimental surgeries, then it would seem as if a whole committee might be able to come up with something within 2-3 months of the filing of the complaint. Instead, the veterinarian suffered retaliation, she was ignored, denied entry to certain laboratory rooms, and was told she would have to repeat her post-doctoral work. That’s what Columbia spent its time doing, Mr. Peterson.

It was not until June 2003—eight months since filing the initial complaint—that the whistleblower was even made aware of the results of Columbia’s so-called investigation. Shockingly, the university admitted that 11 out of 23 animals (almost half!) had not received proper post-surgical or veterinary care. But in its own clever, self-serving way, Columbia tried to fob the blame off to inadequate record-keeping. The university knows very well that the baboons, dogs, and pigs in its laboratories suffered and died without proper painkillers or euthanasia, that neither its researchers nor its veterinary staff complied with the minimal regulations set forth in the miserably paltry Animal Welfare Act, that they did not abide by the similarly basic guidelines for animal care set forth by the Public Health Service, and that things would still be status quo had Dr. Dell’Orto not come forward.

AN INTERNATIONAL
ORGANIZATION DEDICATED
TO PROTECTING
THE RIGHTS OF ALL ANIMALS

Mr. Peterson
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If, as you say, there have been modifications to the animal care program as a result of your university's investigation, why then did we have to write to the United States Department of Agriculture as recently as September 25, 2003, when a litter of puppies was cruelly killed by having needles stuck into their hearts, a method of killing condemned by the American Veterinary Medical Association? Why did we have to write again to the National Institutes of Health about baboon 6533 who had lost 40% of her body weight in Raymond Stark's ridiculous nicotine infusion experiments? Why did we have to write about a poor dog who should have been mercifully put out of her suffering weeks before she was in Oz's experiments? She couldn't even drag herself out of her cage. And why hasn't Columbia answered Dr. Dell'Orto's question as to which animals were found to have received inadequate care? She complained about 23 animals specifically but the university refuses to identify the 12 animals out of that group who were found to have received adequate post-surgical care. How then is Dr. Dell'Orto to refute or even analyze the university's findings? If Columbia found that almost 50% of the animals had not received adequate veterinary or post-surgical care, why are the same players from the researchers to the head veterinarian, down to the shoddy technicians and animal care staff, still in their positions?

Columbia's so-called investigation has been anything but thorough. There are still questions to be answered, animal records to be reviewed, and staff to be interviewed. The government is still investigating, although for a time it seemed as if Columbia had the government in its pocket as well. That remains to be seen as the USDA has just very recently put the wheels in motion to interview Dr. Dell'Orto who contacted them well over one year ago when she originally reported the violations to the university.

While we realize that you must put the best possible face on Columbia's shameful scandal due to fear of losing funding and contributions, we also don't think we should let it go without a letter to set the record straight. If you would like us to help develop a more accurate and honest form letter for Columbia to send out, please let us know.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Mary Beth Sweetland". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Mary Beth Sweetland, Senior Vice President
Director, Research & Investigations Department