Policy Position Statement 03: Animal Research

Research into MS is essential for developing new therapies and ultimately a cure. There is still a great deal which we do not understand about MS and so it is vital that research occurs to increase our knowledge of all levels of the condition. This means following MS from its onset and through its progression.

While the ethics of using animals in medical research are not universally accepted, there is currently no way of accurately predicting the complex response of the body except in a living animal (‘in vivo’). Non-animal data allows identification of possible targets for drug development, but it is only in a living animal that the combination of genes, body chemicals and systems and environmental influences work together. At the moment, it is impossible to investigate this accurately using any other system.

Research using animals has contributed significantly to our understanding of MS and in the development of therapies, specifically in relation to our understanding of the immune system, inflammation and communication within the central nervous system. The recent development of beta interferon, Copaxone and Tysabri was only possible through animal research.

The MS Society’s policy on animal use in research is in accordance with UK law and the best practice standards set by the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC). The AMRC guidance stipulates that the minimum number of animals be used that produce a valid result; that experiments must be designed so as to minimise pain, suffering and distress to the animals; and that alternatives be used wherever possible. The MS Society also refuses to support any research which uses primates.

The MS Society understands that some people may not agree with this policy and we respect their views. However, our responsibility is to people with MS and finding the most effective ways for supporting research into the condition. Any of our donors who do not wish to fund research which may involve the use of animals have the option of requesting that their contributions are not used in this way. Once made, the Society is legally bound to respect any such request.