



PEOPLE FOR
THE ETHICAL
TREATMENT
OF ANIMALS

May 24, 2021

Eliseo J. Pérez-Stable, M.D.
Director
National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities

Via e-mail: eliseo.perez-stable@nih.gov

Dear Dr. Pérez-Stable:

Thank you in advance for your time. I'm writing on behalf of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) and our more than 6.5 million members and supporters worldwide concerning troubling racial bias and insensitivity in an animal experiment funded by the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD).

Based on the information presented below, we urge NIMHD to cancel the award granted to Lisa Tussing-Humphreys, assistant professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, for her project titled "[The influence of structural violence and individual behavior and health on the gut microbiome and colorectal cancer risk.](#)" This project started on September 23, 2017, is scheduled to end on June 30, 2022, and has received more than \$840,000 in taxpayer funding in the past two years.

Tussing-Humphreys' experimental premise is, frankly, racist. In an attempt to correlate perceived violence among African American populations with colorectal cancer, she uses mice to "mimic" the "structural violence observed in urban [African American] communities."¹ According to her, exposing mice to "episodic aggression"—that is, forcing these animals to fight each other—purportedly will help develop "novel strategies to reduce racial disparities" in colorectal cancer.² Obviously, forcing mice to fight each other does not accurately mimic the experiences of African Americans in real life, and any suggestion that it does is wrong and frankly insulting.

In fact, Tussing-Humphreys' premise for using animals in this experiment is as nonsensical as trying to make colorectal cancer health recommendations for non-inner city white populations by using mice who are not subjected to "structural violence" as the test subjects.

As NIMHD acknowledges, health disparities in African American and other communities of color are largely related to socio-economic and political factors, which, in turn, stem from phenomena with deep historical

¹RePORTER. National Institutes of Health. *The influence of structural violence and individual behavior and health on the gut microbiome and colorectal cancer risk.* https://reporter.nih.gov/search/4RDnZa2H7Ems_7F9K0QTUw/project-details/9967842. Accessed April 21, 2021.

²*Ibid.*

Washington, D.C.
1536 16th St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20036
202-483-PETA

Los Angeles
2154 W. Sunset Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90026
323-644-PETA

Norfolk
501 Front St.
Norfolk, VA 23510
757-622-PETA

Berkeley
2855 Telegraph Ave.
Ste. 301
Berkeley, CA 94705
510-763-PETA

Info@peta.org
PETA.org

Affiliates:

- PETA Asia
- PETA India
- PETA France
- PETA Australia
- PETA Germany
- PETA Netherlands
- PETA Foundation (U.K.)

roots in the United States, such as discrimination and racism. Ignoring this systematic complexity, Tussing-Humphreys' approach seems to revive the anachronistic, deterministic, and simplistic idea of the inner city and its racist connotations as a focus of social decay, to which she adds its role as a potential cause of cancer.

Now that our country is finally awakening to the painful and often fatal situations that people of color experience daily, the research community has a responsibility to join the conversation on race and inequality—as NIMHD has done since its inception—and do its part to transform American society. However, this transformation will not come about by harming mice nor by simplistically reducing the complexity of African Americans' lives to poorly designed and cruel animal-based experiments, and consequently, NIMHD's crucial mission will not be realized by funding this kind of misguided study. Taxpayer funds would be better spent on improving access to culturally sensitive cancer screening resources³ or facilitating community-based initiatives aimed at preventing cancer in underserved minority groups.⁴

We urge you to cancel the funding awarded to Tussing-Humphreys for this study and set clear standards for research without the use of animals that will actually reduce and encourage the elimination of health disparities, as NIMHD envisions. Tormenting mice in experiments is not the right path toward achieving this goal. We further urge you to implement the Research Modernization Deal,⁵ a strategy for phasing out animal “models,” which fail to produce treatments for humans 90% of the time. It is supported by the National Medical Association and the National Hispanic Medical Association, which seek to eliminate disparities in healthcare and collectively represent 100,000 African American and Hispanic physicians.

You can contact me at MagnoliaM@peta.org. I look forward to your reply regarding this important matter. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,



Magnolia Martínez, Ph.D.
Special Projects Manager
Laboratory Investigations Department

cc: Michael Lauer, M.D.
Deputy Director for Extramural Research, NIH
michael.lauer@nih.gov

Patricia A. Brown, V.M.D., M.S., DACLAM
Director, Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare, NIH

³Cfr. Menon U, Szalacha LA, Belue R, Rugen K, Martin KR, Kinney AY. Interactive, culturally sensitive education on colorectal cancer screening. *Med Care*. 2008 September;46(9 Suppl. 1):S44-S50. doi:10.1097/MLR.0b013e31818105a0.

⁴Cfr. Strunin L, Wulach L, Yang GJ, et al. Preventing cancer: a community-based program for youths in public housing. *J Adolesc Health*. 2013 May;52(5 Suppl.):S83-S88. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2013.01.010.

⁵People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. *Research Modernization Deal*.

<https://www.peta.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PETA-2021-Research-Modernization-Deal.pdf>.

brownp@od.nih.gov

Members and Executive Secretary of the National Advisory Council on
Minority Health and Health Disparities:

Lisa L. Barnes, Ph.D.
lisa_l_barnes@rush.edu

Neil S. Calman, M.D.
neil.calman@mssm.edu; ncalman@institute2000.org

Marshall H. Chin, M.D., M.P.H., F.A.C.P.
mchin@medicine.bsd.uchicago.edu

Giselle M. Corbie-Smith, M.D., M.S.
gcorbie@med.unc.edu

Joyce A. Hunter, Ph.D.
Executive Secretary
jah8595@gmail.com

Kimberly S. Johnson, M.D.
johns196@mc.duke.edu

Joseph Keawe'aimoku Kaholokula, Ph.D.
kaholoku@hawaii.edu

Matthew Lin, M.D.
C/O Joyce A. Hunter, Ph.D.
Executive Secretary
jah8595@gmail.com

Judith A. Long, M.D.
jalong@mail.med.upenn.edu

Spero M. Manson, Ph.D., M.A.
spero.manson@cuanschutz.edu

Brian Mustanski, Ph.D., M.A.
brian@northwestern.edu

Amelie Ramirez, Dr.P.H., M.P.H., B.S.
ramirezag@uthscsa.edu

Joan Y. Reede, M.D., M.S., M.P.H., M.B.A.
joan_reede@hms.harvard.edu

Kenneth A. Resnicow, Ph.D.
kresnic@umich.edu

Donald Shell, M.D., M.A.
donald.shell4civ@mail.mil

William M. Southerland, Ph.D.
wsoutherland@howard.edu

Carmen Zorrilla, M.D.
carmen.zorrilla@upr.edu