



# 17<sup>th</sup> European Congress on Alternatives to Animal Testing

Linz, Austria, September 5-8, 2012

The “Linz Congress” is an institution on the scene of alternatives to animal experiments, alternating with the World Congress since 1993. While the World Congress is organized in large cities over the globe (last year in Montreal and 2014 in Prague), the Linz Congress is firmly based in an Austrian town that lends its name to a famous jam and nut tart, the *Linzer Torte*.

The Linz Congress is hosted by the Johannes-Kepler-University (JKU). It is a fairly small conference with a familiar and friendly atmosphere and – thanks to numerous sponsors – low registration fees, which make it attractive to scientists with a limited budget and helps them to inform their colleagues on their new developments and results. But also scientists who have not previously been exposed to the subject of alternatives can take their first cautious steps on this unfamiliar terrain. Animal-free methods are still not accepted in all circles as serious science, but the Linz Congress gives interested newcomers the opportunity to discover this scientific field and meet its advocates in person.

Despite its small size, the Congress is international: The presentations are given in English by mainly European but also Canadian and U.S. scientists, who come to present their data, meet new colleagues, and plan future collaborations. The European Society for Alternatives to Animal Testing (EUSAAT), a nonprofit organization which grew out of the MEGAT (Middle European Society for Alternative Methods to Animal Testing) some years ago, organizes the Linz Congress and promotes research in the field of the 3Rs.

Oral presentations, posters, and a 90-minute discussion round highlighted the newest developments. The president of EUSAAT, Prof. Dr Horst Spielmann, started off the meeting with a presentation on his EU project AXLR8 (“accelerate”), which coordinates and speeds up innovations in European safety testing. One of the most important activities of AXLR8 is the organization of workshops in which coordinators of different EU projects can exchange ideas with each other and independent scientists to discuss progress and obstacles and identify future challenges. In safety testing, the move away from animal testing

is strengthening; this stems from increasing acceptance of the fact that animal experiments are influenced by too many uncontrollable variables, that the results are often not reproducible, and those results cannot be transferred to humans. The saying “a human is not a 70 kg rat” has become firmly established.

The program offered a variety of interesting aspects of alternative methods. 51 oral presentations were given in the two-and-a-half days and it was a challenge to find sufficient time to also appreciate the 47 posters. The main subjects, aside from safety testing, were the laws governing the use of animals in experiments (e.g., the EU Cosmetics Directive or the new EU Directive on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes, which has required the writing of new national legislation that will come into force on January 1, 2013) and batch testing of vaccines, which uses many animals and is, therefore, an area of intensive research in the development of alternative methods. New technologies, such as 3D cell cultures, were a special focus. A three-dimensional architecture not only allows direct contact between cells via cell-cell junctions but also enables communication via the exchange of nutrients and signaling molecules. The closer the cell culture technique resembles the natural organism, the higher the probability of obtaining relevant data. Doing justice to these current developments, the entire session on Friday was devoted to this exciting area.

A welcome party on the day of arrival gave all participants the opportunity to catch up or make first contacts. The social evening was the highlight – prizes for exceptional scientific papers and posters were given, information on new developments at EUSAAT was presented, newly elected board members were introduced, and new society members were welcomed.

In all, the Linz Congress was a successful event, which again showed how fast the developments in the area of alternative methods are progressing and how many top-class scientists have made it their mission to replace animal testing.

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