

Dear readers,

with this issue ALTEX is starting into its second quarter century with zeal and optimism.

The uniform English language and steadily increasing impact factor have attracted new readers and new authors. The German ALTEXethik, with articles on the ethics of animal experimentation and German summaries of the years' main articles and news, was well received and has led to independent subscriptions. On the organisational side, the new editorial office in Baltimore now allows us to cater for articles in both British and American English (preference may be stated upon submission of articles).

"Two steps forward, two steps back" is the credo for the revision of Directive 806/69, the EU Animal Protection Directive, with respect to the ethical defensibility of animal experiments. All improvements to secure a systematic ethical evaluation of proposed animal experiments made in the first draft by the European Commission have since been dropped. This is the subject of an open letter to German Chancellor Angela Merkel composed by Kurt Simons, *Menschen für Tierrechte*. This state of affairs is even more distressing in light of the fact that a survey on the quality of design, analysis and reporting of animal experiments in research in the UK and US (summarised in the news section) demonstrates how carelessly animal experiments are often performed and reported, with the result that the conclusions often have no solid basis and are thus of little worth.

Chemical safety testing is the subject of this issue's "Food for thought ..." article by Thomas Hartung. It discusses the question whether the patchwork of toxicological tests we have developed for pharmaceutical testing is a suitable strategy for application to high production volume chemicals and will improve human safety or lead mainly to mostly unfounded consumer scares and economic disasters for chemicals companies. On this note, Mardas Daneshian, Marcel Leist and Thomas Hartung introduce the newly founded Center for Alternatives to Animal Testing – Europe (CAAT-EU) at the University of Konstanz, which will coordinate transatlantic activities to promote humane research and education with CAAT at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and will participate in or coordinate European projects in this area. Its inauguration shall take place on the 30th of March and first sponsors have already pledged their support.

The current issue is dominated by the t⁴ article by Kuegler et al., a detailed assessment of the state of the art for *in vitro* developmental toxicity testing using embryonic stem cells. This will certainly be an excellent reference for anyone interested in this field.

The Draize test for eye irritation is probably the regulatory test that has had most international public attention over the years. The long and tedious road to the successful validation of a first partial alternative to the Draize test is described in an article by Thomas Hartung and many major contributors.

Daniel Brunner and colleagues introduce an updated and user-friendly interactive database on serum-free media. This is complemented by a meeting report on developing and using defined culture media.

In the news, we sadly say goodbye to Elisabeth Zbinden, widow of the late Gerhard Zbinden, and Anny Eck-Hieff, a prominent animal activist. The German Animal Welfare Federation brings us up to date in the saga about primate experiments at the University of Bremen. The denial of an extension of the license for these severe experiments has brought about a heated court battle that is likely to take a number of years more to resolve. Further, the Fraunhofer Institute for Systems and Innovation Research has been commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) to evaluate and advise on their funding of alternatives to animal experiments, a great opportunity to consider the *status quo* and to shape their future strategy.

For those planning to participate in the Linz Congress on 2nd to 4th September 2010 please be advised that the submission deadlines are 30th April for lectures and 28th May for posters (For further information go to www.eusaat.org).

Hoping you enjoy this issue of ALTEX



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