



## Meeting Report

# No More Secrets: Enhancing Transparency in Animal Research – Animalfree Research Forum 2021

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Transparency is crucial for encouraging active participation in democratic life. While a large portion of animal experiments is financially supported through public funding, the general public often do not know what impact their taxes have on animals used in research. Surveys have shown that most people still know very little about the numbers and species of animals used, details on procedures, or the level of pain or distress involved in animal experiments. Moreover, studies with negative results are rarely reported. Therefore, it is crucial to discuss the secrecy associated with the use of animals in research and how more openness can be achieved.

On November 18, 2021, the Swiss-based foundation Animalfree Research held its 11<sup>th</sup> forum in Zurich, Switzerland. This year's title was "No More Secrets: Enhancing Transparency in Animal Research". Speakers from universities, regulatory authorities, industry, and NGOs presented their outlook and activities towards increasing transparency in animal research.

Dr **Silvia Frey**, Managing Director at Animalfree Research, opened the forum, introducing the goals of the Animalfree Research foundation and the aims of the forum.

Dr **Miriam Zemanova**, Scientific Associate at Animalfree Research, started the meeting with an introductory talk on transparency. Dr Zemanova spoke on the importance of transparency in our society and the upsurge in calls for more transparency across stakeholders in animal research including animal welfare organizations, laboratory animal scientists, and governments.

Prof. Dr **Angela Martin**, professor at the Department of Philosophy, University of Basel, held a lecture entitled "Increasing transparency in animal research – suggestions from an ethical perspective". Prof. Martin explained that transparency should be present at all stages of animal research. For instance, during the planning stage it is advisable to use an international registry to avoid duplication of studies. The research approval stage should be more transparent, and more information about the work of animal ethics committees should be available. The publication of negative results is an important part of transparency in the final reporting of studies.

Dr **Otto Maissen**, Head of the Department of Animal Experimentation and Evaluations at the Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (FSVO), spoke on "Regulation and transparency in the field of animal testing". Dr Maissen provided an overview of the current Swiss legislation on animal testing. Specifically, he

discussed the content of the Animal Welfare Act and how its specific articles relate to transparency in animal research. Dr Maissen also outlined the role and obligations of the FSVO and what information is publicly available on the FSVO website.

Dr **Armand Mensen**, Scientific Officer at the Swiss 3R Competence Centre (3RCC), presented the activities of the Centre towards increasing transparency in animal use. The Swiss 3RCC monitors animal use in science in Switzerland and recently produced a summary of animal use for educational purposes.

PD Dr **Birgit Ledermann**, President of the Swiss Laboratory Animal Science Association, presented several examples of activities of various organizations within Switzerland, including universities and industry, that aim to increase transparency in animal research. Dr Ledermann described the animal search portal of the Swiss Laboratory Animal Science Association, institutional and industry webpages, International Laboratory Technician Week, and other initiatives.

The last speaker, Dr **Nico Müller**, Project Collaborator at Animalfree Research, gave a presentation entitled "Transparency: conceptual and strategic challenges". His talk was based on philosophical considerations of transparency as an essentially contested concept, and he presented the results from a survey on transparency conducted by Animalfree Research among researchers and institutional representatives in the biotechnology sector.

A panel discussion with all invited speakers and two board members of Animalfree Research, Dr **Markus Rimann** and Dr **Erwin Kump**, concluded the Forum. Among the topics were, for example, intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation for transparency among researchers and the obstacles to establishing a federal public portal listing non-technical summaries as well as study outcomes of all animal research projects conducted in Switzerland.

The event was very well received by the participants and paved the way for further work and collaborations in enhancing transparency in animal research. We thank all the speakers for sharing their perspectives on this topic.

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