CAAT feed

The Johns Hopkins Center for Alternatives to Animal Testing (CAAT, http://caat.jhsph.edu/) has worked with scientists since 1981 to find new methods to replace the use of laboratory animals in experiments, reduce the number of animals tested, and refine necessary tests to eliminate pain and distress. We are an academic, science-based center affiliated with the Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health. We believe the best science is humane science. Our programs seek to provide a better, safer, more humane future for people and animals.

We provide a variety of resources, including grants for scientists developing non-animal methods, workshops on alternative methods, books, newsletters, and other publications. We also manage Altweb (http://altweb.jhsph.edu/), an international online clearinghouse of alternatives news and resources. Altweb has widespread, broad-based international support, working with a Project Team that currently consists of 26-member organizations representing industry, academia, government agencies, animal welfare organizations, and advocacy groups in North America, the European Union, and Asia. Altweb remains the most comprehensive guide to alternatives on the Web, drawing an average of 16,000 unique visitors every month from more than 130 countries. Many additional visitors access the Altweb RSS news feed. New visitors make up 82% of the traffic, indicating a growing interest in alternatives, while researchers and scientists who use the site on a regular basis form a core 12% of visits.

In 2009, Prof. Thomas Hartung became CAAT’s new Director, and the inaugural Doerenkamp-Zbinden chair for Evidence-based Toxicology (see also his Food for thought article in this issue of ALTEx). Thomas Hartung was head of ECVAM from 2002 to 2008. Founding Director emeritus, Prof. Alan Goldberg, has transitioned to a new role as Chairman of CAAT’s Advisory Board.

ALTEx is now the official journal of CAAT and the Transatlantic Think Tank of Toxicology (t4) organized by CAAT. With Thomas Hartung as the new North American editor, ALTEx has now expanded to the US and become an international journal for alternative methods. The news corner CAATfeed will keep ALTEx readers informed on CAAT’s activities on a regular basis.

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CAAT’s move onto the Johns Hopkins Medical Campus enables us to establish scientific laboratories. Our first focus will be on Developmental Neurotoxicity (DNT). Notably, CAAT organized its second International Conference on DNT within CAAT’s TestSmart series of workshops in November 2008 in Reston, Virginia. Speaker presentations and meeting abstracts are now posted on the DNT2 page of the CAAT website (http://caat.jhsph.edu/dnt2/program.htm). In addition, for the benefit of stakeholders interested in alternative tests for developmental neurotoxicity (DNT), and in response to the clear desire to continue the dialogue on methods development and use that began at the TestSmart DNT2 meeting, the Steering Committee members have created a DNT Community of Practice Forum, which can be found on the AltTox website at www.alttox.org.

In June 2007, the National Academy of Science (NAS) released its report, Toxicity Testing and Assessment in the Twenty-first Century: A Vision and a Strategy (Tox-21c). Tox-21c is essentially a roadmap for the future, representing a shift in the current testing paradigm by advocating the utilization of high-throughput, in vitro test methods that focus on human rather than animal biology. Current and past members of the CAAT faculty and Advisory Board served on the committee, and CAAT will continue its work as a “champion” of this vision.

In March 2009, CAAT hosted a first Tox-21c implementation meeting with representatives from the US and Europe. CAAT is focusing on the implementation of the NAS report in the US and is in the process of setting up a lab, with doctoral students, and post-doctoral fellows at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health to advance the science necessary to develop evidence-based toxicology and new alternative methodologies.

Concurrently, CAAT Professor Paul Locke, through the Policy and Outreach Program, is working to educate legislators about the need for regulatory change and the acceptance of these new methods. The program is organizing a series of five symposia to explore the legal, policy and scientific steps necessary to implement Tox-21c. These symposia, scheduled to begin in summer 2009 and run through fall 2010, will take place in multiple US locations, and Canada, and will target scientists, policy makers, risk assessors, and environmental and animal lawyers and advocates. Each symposium will result in a series of articles for publication in legal, scientific and policy journals. The Outreach Program also includes educational initiatives on Capitol Hill, including a Congressional staff briefing on humane science and the need for global regulatory harmonization scheduled for June, 2009.

CAAT’s research grants program is the centerpiece of our work, providing critical seed money for scientists to develop alternatives to the use of animals in biomedical research and product safety testing. To date, the Center has funded some 300 grants (including renewals) for a total of more than $6 million. At its annual fall meeting, CAAT’s Advisory Board members review applications to the research grant program, allowing members the opportunity to consider cutting-edge research and technology in the early stages. For 2008/9, CAAT awarded eleven grants relating to refinement, developmental toxicology,
immunotoxicology, and translational toxicology. The CAAT research grants program costs approximately $250,000 per year and is funded entirely through contributions from companies and foundations. The 2009/10 Call for Proposals is currently posted on the CAAT website.

CAAT’s Academic Programs educate students and professionals in the research field about alternatives, helping them gain a better understanding of the 3Rs and their role in improving the quality of science. The Humane Science and Toxicology Certificate Program is central to CAAT’s academic program, with a curriculum consisting of six courses, offered both in the class room and on-line through the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. The certificate program is open to anyone who holds an undergraduate or graduate degree in public health or the biomedical sciences, as well as to students in any degree-granting program at the Johns Hopkins University. In an important step designed to make the Certificate Program easily accessible to wide audience in business, legal and regulatory communities, CAAT is working to make the Humane Science and Toxicology Certificate Program available entirely on-line by 2010.

CAAT also offers a free online course: Enhancing Humane Science/Improving Animal Research. This course provides a broad overview of diverse topics in humane science, including experimental design, humane endpoints, environmental enrichment, post-surgical care, pain management, and the impact of stress on the quality of data. The self-paced course consists of 12 audio lectures with accompanying slides, resource lists, and study questions and is available on the CAAT website (http://caat.jhsph.edu/).

With the introduction of such EU regulations as REACH and the 7th Amendment to the Cosmetics Directive, EU-US relations in the field of humane science have become even more critical. CAAT is working to establish a Humane Sciences and In Vitro Alternatives component to a larger Johns Hopkins proposal for an EU Center of Excellence. In July, 2008, CAAT became part of the American Consortium on European Studies (ACES), in order to establish a Humane Sciences and In Vitro Alternatives component to this EU Center of Excellence based at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). One of eleven EU Centers of Excellence in the United States, ACES (http://transatlantic.sais-jhu.edu/index.htm) was created in 2001 to advance academic and public understanding of the European Union and to improve US-EU relations. It seeks to strengthen education and research opportunities and to create new synergies among scholars, students, policymakers and the private sector, representatives of governmental and non-governmental organizations, and the media. In addition to SAIS, the Consortium includes American University, George Mason University, George Washington University, and Georgetown University.

Through ACES, CAAT will serve as an information gateway, working to establish programs that provide reciprocity in communication between the EU and the US in the area of alternatives and the humane sciences. As part of this EU Center of Excellence, CAAT will coordinate EU-related humane sciences and alternatives activities in the United States, share US progress with our European counterparts, and foster a greater understanding and awareness of alternatives and the respective regulatory requirements of the EU and the US.

CAAT will hold a 1-day workshop and information session for members of the cosmetics and personal care industry on July 8, 2009 in Baltimore, Maryland. This session will offer an in-depth update on the 7th amendment of the European Cosmetics Directive, which went into effect on March 11, 2009, and bans the sale of any cosmetic product if either the finished product or any ingredients has been tested on animals. (The March 2013 deadline only applies to the following three test areas: reproductive toxicity, repeat dose toxicity and toxicokinetics.) If you register by July 1, 2009, this workshop is free for all CAAT sponsors and their employees, and $800 for others. After July 1st, the cost will be $200 and $1200, respectively. Registration is required.

In addition to the ‘Food for Thought’ articles in ALTEX, the following articles may be of interest:


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