



# E.B.R.A.

European Biomedical Research Association



Presidente: Prof. Filippo Drago

## Bollettino d'informazione scientifica

### NATURE | EDITORIAL

#### Voice of Pro-Test

*Confidence is rising among scientists defending animal research. It should be encouraged*

The name Pro-Test is becoming a rallying point for scientists standing up to animalrights extremists. The term was coined by 16-year-old British school pupil Laurie Pycroft in January 2006, when he stumbled across an animalrights demonstration in Oxford. The activists were Pro-Testing against the construction of a university biomedical building with modern animal facilities. Their violent strategies, including the placing of bombs, had already forced some building contractors to pull out. Important research was being hampered, thought Pycroft. He sprang into action, creating the first Pro-Test committee with university students and teachers, and organizing a rally to coincide with the activists' next demonstration the following month.

In what was probably the first mass public showing in defence of animal research, about 1,000 scientists and students attended, overshadowing the 200-odd animal-rights protesters. That was a tipping point in Britain. Although the country had some of the world's strictest animal experimentation regulations, its scientists felt at risk from militant antivivisectionists. Most kept their heads below the parapet. But under the Pro-Test banner, they lost their fear of speaking out, particularly after politicians including then prime minister Tony Blair showed support for their cause. The Oxford facility eventually got built.

Fast forward six years, to Italy. Last July, activists broke into the Green Hill beaglebreeding facility near Brescia, claiming that the animals, many of which were used for mandatory toxicity testing of drugs, were treated cruelly. Police allowed the activists to take the dogs away and a court later said that they could keep custody of the animals, pending investigations. Italy's legal system being notoriously slow, the facility remains shut. Last week, most of the staff were laid off.

Concerned that the police and courts seemed to condone the methods of the animal activists — and that scientists had no safe platform to explain their animal research — a group of

Italian scientists created Pro-Test Italia in September. Just in time, as it unhappily turned out: on 20 April, the same activists (by now calling themselves Fermare Green Hill, or Stop Green Hill), broke into an animal facility at the University of Milan, chaining themselves by the necks to the doors and refusing to leave without the animals, mostly mice. Twelve hours later, after tense negotiations, they left with some of the animals — and with police assurance that they could come back for the rest. Before leaving, the activists mixed up the animals and cage labels to sabotage ongoing experiments.

The next day, scores of scientists and students demonstrated in the streets under the Pro-Test Italia banner. A major pro-research demonstration is planned in Milan's city centre on 1 June. The university has refused to let the activists come back, and is preparing to bring charges. Scientists there — from students to the rector — have signed open letters condemning the animalrights activists' actions and explaining why medical research using animals is important.

The Basel Declaration Society, created in 2010 to encourage scientists to talk openly about their work using animals, has rallied heartening international support for the Milanese scientists. By 7 May, more than 4,000 researchers around the globe had signed its call for solidarity, posted just one week earlier. The call also demands fairer media coverage of research using animals, and zero tolerance from police and policymakers towards acts of animalrights extremism.

The use of animal experiments to further medical advances is a delicate issue, and there is no place in the debate for violence. There is, however, a need for scientists to talk openly, and it is encouraging to see their new confidence. Pro-Test Italia is actually the third franchise using Pycroft's term. Pro-Test for Science was set up at the University of California, Los Angeles, four years ago after attacks on researchers. Meanwhile, UK Pro-Test ended operations in 2011, content that it had achieved its aim of giving a voice to researchers. It had shown

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that when it comes to resolving ethical tensions between animal research and medical and veterinary health, we need more scientists prepared to Pro-Test against activist violence.

#### CHI SONO I PRO-TESTERS ITALIANI?

Pro-Test Italia rappresenta ricercatori, scienziati, veterinari, divulgatori scientifici e tutti coloro che hanno interesse nella scienza e vogliono battersi affinché sia fatta una migliore informazione pubblica riguardante l'importanza degli animali nella ricerca biomedica.

Ad oggi, il gruppo italiano è rappresentato da un ristretto gruppo di persone accumulate dal desiderio di contrastare la disinformazione inerente la sperimentazione animale e di supportare pubblicamente la sua importanza per il progresso medico ed umano.

Il loro obiettivo è sfatare i miti irrazionali promossi dagli animalisti attivisti e di incoraggiare la gente a supportare la scienza che salva le vite ed il progresso umano.

L'associazione si propone come fonte accessibile ed autorevole per tutti i mezzi di informazione Italiani, nonché come tramite tra i giornalisti ed i ricercatori al fine di promuovere notizie pubbliche scientificamente corrette e veritiere, così da contribuire ad una migliore comprensione ed apprezzamento della ricerca animale eseguita con giudizio.

#### Giugno-Agosto 2013

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### RESEARCH | HIGHLIGHT

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#### Repeated Cortico-Striatal Stimulation Generates Persistent OCD-Like Behavior

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#### Abstract

Although cortico-striato-thalamo-cortical (CSTC) circuit dysregulation is correlated with obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), causation cannot be tested in humans. We used optogenetics in mice to simulate CSTC hyperactivation observed in OCD patients. Whereas acute orbitofrontal cortex (OFC)–ventromedial striatum (VMS) stimulation did not produce repetitive behaviors, repeated hyperactivation over multiple days generated a progressive increase in grooming, a mouse behavior related to OCD. Increased grooming persisted for 2 weeks after stimulation cessation. The grooming increase was temporally coupled with a progressive increase in light-evoked firing of postsynaptic VMS cells. Both increased grooming and evoked firing were reversed by chronic fluoxetine, a first-line OCD treatment. Brief but repeated episodes of abnormal circuit activity may thus set the stage for the development of persistent psychopathology.