

Brown U criticized for using live pigs in medical training

January 30 2019, by Jennifer Mcdermott

An advocacy group has asked federal regulators to investigate Brown University's medical school, arguing it is violating the law by using live pigs for training in emergency medicine.

The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine on Tuesday asked the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service to investigate animal use at the Warren Alpert Medical School at the Ivy League university.

Brown University and Rhode Island Hospital partner for biomedical research, teaching and clinical programs. They said in a joint statement Wednesday that the hospital abides by all federal regulations and follows strict protocols for using animals. This includes advanced trauma life support training in the emergency medicine residency program affiliated with Brown's medical school, they said.

The committee advocates for eliminating the use of live animals in any medical training and promotes the use of human-body simulators instead.

Proponents of animal research argue it is crucial to scientific breakthroughs and for furthering medical science. Brown and Rhode Island Hospital say they are committed to ensuring the highest ethical standards for the responsible use of animals and employ alternatives to animals when doing so will support scientific and academic goals.

Many emergency medicine residency programs in the United States and Canada use only human-based training methods, such as medical simulation or cadavers, according to the committee.

Brown, in Providence, violated the federal Animal Welfare Act because alternatives to animal use exist, so using pigs for emergency medicine training is not justified or unavoidable, said Dr. John Pippin, director of academic affairs for the Physicians Committee.

He also contends the school's animal care and use committee does not properly oversee the use of pigs for the training, which would also violate the act.

"The purpose of all of these training programs, including at Brown, is to produce the best possible physicians in the field of emergency medicine. Everyone agrees on that," said Pippin, a cardiologist in Dallas. "What I'm claiming, and I think I can prove, is the best way to do this does not include the use of animals."

The committee is not looking for the university to be penalized in any way, Pippin said; rather, it's hoping to motivate Brown to pay attention to the information the committee provided.

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