The acceptance of animal use in biomedical research by the broader society depends upon at least two principles: 1) that the science is of the highest merit, furthering the health and welfare of humans and animals and 2) that the process of science considers animal welfare squarely and sensibly, inflicting no unnecessary harm or distress. These points must be considered, iteratively, as science progresses, as alternatives become available and as public attitudes about animal welfare change. Therefore, a continuing public discourse about scientific accomplishment and scientific use of animals must be a regular part of our efforts, as scientists. That discourse is difficult to achieve, however, when animal rights activists and extremists use uncivil methods to achieve an end to animal-based research. They persistently claim, despite any evidence to the contrary, that animal research is bogus, profit-based and useless. They claim it is intentionally cruel and perpetrated by crazed scientists. And increasingly often, they use criminal threats, harassment and violence to achieve their goals. Each of these facts distorts the public discourse on humane use of animals in research, leading to a withdrawal of the scientific voice.

Scientists must remember, however, that the discourse is with the public, not with the narrow segment of animal rights activists. We must move past their threats and misinformation campaigns because it is our obligation to share information about the “whys”, “hows” and “whats” of research with the civilized public. It should be our mission to educate, to listen to social concerns about animal welfare and to practice science in a manner that is consistent both with its goals of improving health and welfare of humans and animals and with the civil standards of decent behavior.

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