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Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy

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Dear George,

Thank you for your email dated 13 September to Andrea Leadsom, enclosing correspondence from your constituent , regarding Early Day Motion (EDM) 400, "Applying results of experiments on animals to human patients". Your letter has been passed to this Department for reply and I am doing so as this matter falls within my portfolio.

The Government considers that the carefully regulated use of animals in scientific research remains a vital tool in improving the understanding of how biological systems work and in the development of safe new medicines, treatments and technologies.

At the same time, we recognise that this is a controversial and emotive issue and we take it very seriously. The Government believes that animals should only be used when there is no practicable alternative and this is, rightly, a highly regulated and scrutinised area of science.

At the forefront of any decision to use animals in research is the need for robust evidence to justify the use of animals. The UK's regulatory system requires that those licensed to carry out research using animals ensure their proposals comply fully with the principles of the 3Rs (reduce, refine and replace the use of animals in scientific research). It also requires a harm-benefit analysis of all licence applications for animal research to ensure that any harm that may be caused to the animals in terms of suffering, pain and distress is justified by the expected benefits for humans, animals or the environment.

The Government agrees that debate is essential in a democracy and in the past 15 years there have been some important reviews including the 2002 report of the House of Lords Select Committee on Animals in Scientific Procedures, which found that there is a continued need for animal experiments both in applied research and in research aimed purely at extending knowledge.

The 2006 Weatherall report on the use of non-human primates concluded that there is 'a strong scientific case for maintaining work on non-human primates for carefully selected research problems'.
The changes to the legislation governing the use of animals in research implemented in 2013 were debated in both Houses of Parliament. A recent letter to the Guardian (13 September 2016) supporting the careful and considered use of non-human primates to enable the development of treatments for neurodegenerative diseases such as Parkinson's, was signed by over 400 scientists.

Advances in biomedical science and technologies, including stem cell research, in vitro systems that mimic the function of human organs and imaging and new computer modelling techniques, are all providing new opportunities to reduce reliance on the use of animals in research. The Government supports these developments through funding for the National Centre for the Replacement Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs), and through the Research Councils and Innovate UK who have contributed to a Non-animal Technologies Road map for the UK.

In the UK the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency is the responsible authority for the assessment and licensing of medical products. Pharmaceutical legislation requires that before a new medicine is granted a licence, a battery of in vitro and in vivo tests are conducted to establish the toxicity profiles for the medicine. The legislation requires that new medicines are generally tested in a rodent and a non-rodent species before human clinical trials can begin.

This testing is undertaken to provide assurance of the safety of medicines before they are given to humans. As a result of adverse findings from animal studies, a large number of drug candidates do not progress to being tested in humans. Removing testing could compromise human safety, which we would consider to be unacceptable.

The Early Day Motion (EDM 400) rightly draws attention to the UK life science sector's Concordat on openness in animal research which was launched in 2014 and now has over 100 signatories. The Government warmly welcomes this concordat and the efforts of all organisations involved in animal research to provide new opportunities for transparency and debate in this area.

I hope that this helps in replying to your constituent.

Yours ever,

JO JOHNSON MP