

Animal welfare prize for milder skin allergy test

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Three scientists have been awarded Europe's premier laboratory animal welfare prize for 2000. They jointly developed a test for the potential of chemicals to cause allergic skin reactions, or skin sensitisation. This test uses fewer animals and causes less suffering than previous tests.

The SmithKline Beecham Laboratory Animal Welfare Prize is awarded annually by the Research Defence Society (RDS) for significant contributions to improving the welfare of animals in laboratories or techniques that reduce the number of animals required. The prize rewards achievements in the **three Rs - reduction, refinement or replacement** - which are the guiding principles of modern laboratory animal science and welfare.

Dr Ian Kimber of Zeneca (now Syngenta) CTL, Dr Frank Gerberick of Procter & Gamble and Dr David Basketter of Unilever worked together to develop and validate the new test, known as the murine local lymph node assay (LLNA). The prize - consisting of £2000 and an inscribed plaque - will be presented to Dr Kimber at the annual meeting of RDS in London next week.

The LLNA test provides an alternative to the established guinea pig tests - the guinea pig maximisation test and the Beuhler assay. It has been endorsed by European and international validation bodies. Last year, about 18,000 procedures for skin sensitisation were carried out on guinea pigs in the UK, the majority for non-pharmaceutical products. This number is now expected to decrease. For decades guinea pig tests have been the standard methods accepted by regulators worldwide for assessing skin sensitisation potential. These tests require the shaving and bandaging of animals and usually last several weeks. By comparison, the LLNA causes less stress; there is no need for shaving or bandaging and animals receive the test chemical on the surface of the skin. In addition the LLNA requires the use of fewer animals than the standard guinea pig tests.

The LLNA provides robust objective and quantitative data which is more readily understood by other laboratories. The data generated provides a much sounder basis for the ultimate development of non-animal models, a target which scientists continue to strive for.