European Animal Research Association

EARA News Digest – Week 49

Welcome to your Monday morning update, from EARA, on the latest developments in science, policy and openness in animal research in Europe and around the world.

Research

EARA member wins award for animal research communications

EARA member Infopunt Proefdieronderzoek (IPPO) have won the Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium for Science and the Arts (KVAB) annual prize for science communication.

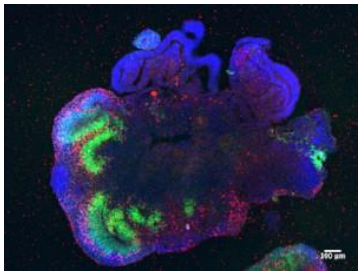
'The young researchers (pictured) behind IPPO were recognised (in Flemish) for their initiative providing nuanced information about animal research to the general public.

The awards jury said that IPPO had also fulfilled a social role: by combatting current misconceptions.

Meanwhile, Marta Moita, a researcher based at EARA member the Champalimaud Centre for the Unknown, Portugal, has received a €2 million grant from the European Research Council to fund a study that will look at whether fruit flies exhibit typical 'fight or flight' behaviour.

And Professor Pascale Cossart of the Institut Pasteur, Paris, has been honoured with the 2018 Heinrich Wieland Prize for her fundamental contributions to Molecular Infection Biology. The prize, is awarded by the Boehringer Ingelheim Foundation.

Policy



Research on organoids fuels ethical debate

The ethical consequences of developing organoids - miniature versions of organs, produced in vitro—continue to hit the headlines.

Researchers from the University of California, San Diego, recently noted that the brain organoids they created spontaneously produce brain waves which resemble those found in premature babies.

However, electrical activity does not

automatically mean the organoids are becoming conscious.

Brain organoids, sometimes nicknamed 'minibrains', (see video) were originally developed at the Institute of Molecular Biology, in Vienna, Austria.

It was also reported that kidney organoids grown at Washington University School of Medicine (WUSM), St. Louis, USA, comprised up to 20% non-renal tissue—mostly rogue brain and muscle cells.

The findings have prompted calls for further consideration of the ethics of organoids.

Policy

Science ponders CRISPR babies news

Following news of an attempt to create the first gene-edited babies resistant to HIV, smallpox, and cholera, there has been a mixed response from the science community.

Scientist He Jiankui (pictured), at the Southern University of Science and Technology, Shenzhen, announced last week the birth of twin girls in whom a gene called

CCR5 had been eliminated using the CRISPR gene-editing technique.

Previously published Chinese medical documents indicated that couples were being recruited for an attempt to create the first gene-edited babies——by He and his team . While not all of the claims have been independently verified, this has not prevented a stormy response to the possibility of CRISPR babies.

For Professor John Evans, of the University of California San Diego, the development represents a sinister return to eugenics.

Others point to more practical and scientific concerns. Sandy Starr of biomedical charity the Progress Educational Trust told *The Times* that the technology needed to be considered alongside projects such as the creation of animals that contain human cells and the generation of sperm and eggs in a dish.

As scientist and biothethicist John D. Loike writes in *Science*, 'I believe this “first” underscores the importance of guidelines, rather than reactive prohibitions or restrictions.'

Research

Study shows benefits of smaller doses of yellow fever vaccine

A new study shows that a small dose of yellow fever can provide lasting protection

Concerned at shortfalls in the international supply of yellow fever vaccine, a team from Leiden University Medical Center and Maasstad Hospital, the Netherlands investigated the efficacy of using smaller doses.

The researchers found that using a yellow fever vaccine at one-fifth of the standard dose still provides protection against the virus for at least 10 years.

This technique for extending the vaccine supply builds on a long history of reducing yellow fever's impact - from the discovery, in monkeys, that it is viral rather than bacterial in nature, to methods of reducing its effects in mice.

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European Animal Research Association
Abbey House
74-76 St John Street
London EC1M 4DZ
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