

Opposition against patent on ‘Alzheimer-apes’

Patented process causes severe animal suffering
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Testbiotech has filed an opposition against a patent on ‘Alzheimer-animals’. The patent (EP3066203) covers rodents and non-human primates, including great apes. The animals are genetically engineered to develop symptoms of Alzheimer’s disease. The patented process causes severe suffering in the animals while, at the same time, any potential medical benefits are doubtful. The patent was granted by the European Patent Office (EPO) in 2020 to research institutions in France. Ethical concerns are the reason for filing the opposition: patents on laboratory animals raise expectations of profits and can create an extra incentive to conduct unnecessary animal experiments.

There are already dozens of ‘animal models’ aiming to simulate Alzheimer’s disease. The genetically engineered laboratory animals all have in common that they develop various symptoms of the disease. Even so none of these experiments have actually led to the development of effective therapies or medications. The patent we are opposing is based on the idea of generating symptoms of Alzheimer’s disease in animals, such as mice and apes, for pharmaceutical research.

European patent law only allows patents on animals if consequent animal suffering can be justified by the expectation of ‘substantial medical benefit’. However, Testbiotech analysis has shown that this is not the case here: existing evidence shows that symptoms arising from genetic engineering cannot be considered to be identical to those of Alzheimer’s disease in humans.

“It cannot be ruled out that the animal experiments might result in some new findings. There is however no evidence of substantial medical benefit. On the contrary, previous failures show that any expectations of success are extremely questionable,” says Christoph Then for Testbiotech. “In general, patents are much less about benefits to patients and much more about making a profit. Animal suffering can never be a justification for making a profit.”

According to the patent description, the use of adult animals is one of the differences to previous animal models: unlike most other experiments, the genetic manipulation is not performed on embryos. Rather, the genetically engineered viruses described in the patent are injected into the brain of adult animals in order to insert deleterious genetic information into the animal genome. In response, the neuronal cells develop symptoms, such as so-called plaques, which are typical for some forms of Alzheimer’s disease. This process aims to create symptoms with more similarity to those observed in humans. However, no evidence of substantial medical benefit for patients has been found thus far.

Currently, around 10 million animals are ‘used’ for laboratory experiments in the EU. These numbers continue to increase, especially in context of genetic engineering. Attempts to reduce the number of animals have so far only been partially successful. According to Testbiotech, we have to prevent interests in patents and profits from becoming an additional incentive to conduct these kinds of experiments. Testbiotech has recently filed several other similar oppositions at the EPO.

Contact:

Christoph Then, info@testbiotech.org [1], Tel + 49 (0) 151 54638040

Further information: [The opposition \(in German\)](#) [2]

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