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Hot from the press!

Interview with Dr. Stefanie Schindler and Dr. Silvia Frey Animalfree Research

A Follow-up to the Article about the TEDD Conference at ZHAW Waedenswil

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The TEDD & 3R (Refine, Reduce and Replace animal experimentation) conference was organized by TEDD (Tissue Engineering for Drug Development and Substance Testing) together with Animalfree Research (www.animalfree-research.org). The Foundation has the vision of a world without animal experiments, which is why it supports research into alternative methods and their further development. As soon as procedures not entailing the use of an animal are available, the law requires that they be applied. A few questions to **Dr. Stefanie Schindler**, Co-CEO and head of education, consultation and research, and **Dr. Silvia Frey**, member of the foundation board, shed new light on this organization:



Dr. Stefanie Schindler, Co-CEO and head of education, consultation and research of Animalfree Research. Picture Animalfree Research.



Dr. Silvia Frey, member of the foundation board, Animalfree Research. Picture Animalfree Research.

Animalfree Research is supporting the 3R Update project in order to reduce animal suffering thanks to improved literature searches. What exactly does this involve?

Silvia Frey: In short, it is an online test to enable scientists to develop suitable search strategies on alternative methods, *i.e.* to determine whether there is an alternative testing system to animal experiments. In 2016, a scientific paper was published covering the background and first successes. In June 2017, the project will be completed and the course will be integrated into the standard programme. This is a true success story, because once researchers know about an alternative method there is a good chance that they will decide against animal experiments. However, the already enormous volume of data has increased steadily. Thus in July 2012 the ‘*ECVAM Search Guide for Animal Alternatives*’ was released (ECVAM = European Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods). It provides examples of possible strategies for a selective search of 3R methods. Now, with the 3R Update tool, scientists directing animal experimentation in Switzerland will be trained to evaluate the existence of alternative biomedical and preclinical methods. It should be noted that the 3R Update course will be mandatory.

Can you give us some examples of successful campaigns?

Stefanie Schindler: To my delight, the very first project which I suggested for funding has become a great success. At a congress, I heard about the development of an exposure chamber for inhalable substances that is based on cell cultures and is completely animal-free. The presentation intrigued me and when, at the end, it was mentioned that the project is currently dormant because of lack of funding, I suggested it to the board for financial support. The sum involved was not large, but it got things moving again. A scientific paper was produced but there were no further requests for help, so I lost track of it. Only some years later did I learn by coincidence that the chamber is now commercially available and is apparently used both widely and successfully.

In which areas would you like to become more heavily involved in the future?

Stefanie Schindler: I am a great believer in education – both my parents were teachers – and I think there is a gap in teaching young people about animal experimentation and the 3Rs. I find that the general public is tired of this subject: animal experimentation is seen as nasty but necessary, and there is nothing anyone can do about it. Which is not the case. Currently I am very involved in the mandatory courses for animal experimenters in Zurich, an activity I enjoy. But these are people who have already decided on a career in the Life Sciences. I think knowledge about this topic should be considered general knowledge, something that is taught in school – appropriately presented, of course, and for older children, since it is a rather complex issue. Animal experiments concern everyone, and so do alternative methods.

What are the goals of your research activities, and especially your cooperation with the group of Professor Michael Raghunath at TEDD?

Silvia Frey: We are in general committed to and are supporting research projects which are targeted at replacing or reducing animal testing. In order that the results of successfully completed projects find their way from research to the industrial laboratory, we agree financing not only for part of the research but also for the publication of results in renowned scientific journals. At the same time, we publish the results on our website for broad public appeal.

Which specific target groups do you want to appeal to with your joint campaigns with the Competence Center TEDD led by Prof Raghunath at ZHAW Waedenswil? What are you hoping will come out of their support?

Stefanie Schindler: In many cases, people are working with very elaborate cell culture methods – for scientific reasons, because it is the best model for their research. But it never occurs to them that they are – unintentionally – contributing to animal-free testing. With their work, they are developing and improving animal-free methods and, by using those, are adding to a valuable and relevant body of scientific literature. Seen that way, there are natural synergies between what TEDD and what Animalfree Research are doing: proving that high-class science can be performed without using live animals, and that cell culture systems and in-vitro methods are the way forward.

Can you summarize the programme of Animalfree Research for the next few years in a few keywords?

Silvia Frey: We see ourselves as members of an association that respects the dignity of animals and recognizes the high value of animal welfare. To address this issue we want to entirely replace animal experiments and thus focus on supporting research projects which replace animal experiments. To gain the support of like-minded people we participate in political and social dialogue and supply our knowledge to government commissions and working parties. We are a centre of expertise on alternatives to animal experiments, and a point of contact for science, industry, media, government and the general public.

I would like to draw attention to our call for research project proposals aimed at the replacement of animal experimentation methods in Switzerland for the period 1.1.2018–31.12.2019, which provides a funding sum of up to CHF 100,000. Please click on:

<http://www.animal-free-research.org/de/forschung/call-for-project-proposals.html>

Which actions are planned for the near future together with the Competence Center TEDD at ZHAW Waedenswil, perhaps also on an international level?

Stefanie Schindler: To be frank, we don't know yet. Animalfree Research is a TEDD member and is therefore closely involved in all activities, and we hope for further opportunities for collaborations soon. We are especially happy that TEDD has given us a stage to introduce ourselves to the other members and place the above-mentioned call for project proposals.

We thank you for these comments.

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Corrigendum

The title of the Biotechnet column in *CHIMIA* 2017, Vol. 71, No. 5, pp 312-314, 'TEDD & 3R Workshop at ZHAW Waedenswil on 7 April 2017 Organized in collaboration with Animal Research' was incorrect. The event was organized in collaboration with **Animalfree Research**. We apologise to Animalfree Research for this mistake.

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