

8/26/16



## A Letter from Dr. Neal Barnard, President of Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine

I have momentous news to share. After more than three decades of perseverance by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, we can now announce that **the days of using dogs and other animals to teach medical students are finally over.**

When I was a medical student at George Washington University, I refused to participate in a required "dog lab," and I vowed to end these laboratories. Well, the last two known hold-outs—the Johns Hopkins University and the University of Tennessee—have both made the decision to end the use of animals in their medical schools, which means that all medical schools in the United States and Canada are completely free of animal laboratories in teaching. **We have won this fight.**

In 1985, when I founded the Physicians Committee, most medical schools required students who were eager to learn how to treat and heal to instead kill their first patient. Dogs were injected with various drugs to see the physiological responses or cut open so students could perform minor surgical procedures. At the end of every dog lab, the animal was killed.

We worked hard to stop these labs for two reasons:

First, the obvious cruelty to the animals was unconscionable.

Second, when medical students are trained like this, they come to believe that killing animals is somehow essential to medicine and science. That had to stop.

At many medical schools, students who refused to participate were penalized or even expelled. At the **Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences** (the U.S. military's medical school), students could be court-martialed for refusing to take part in the animal labs.

Often we worked directly with medical students and faculty—like those at **Harvard Medical School**—to replace animals. Other times, we used the law, like when we helped a **University of Colorado** student sue her school for requiring that she participate in the dog lab.

At other schools, we held **demonstrations** with celebrities and other physicians. We put up **billboards**. We also held on-campus **presentations** and **discussions**. Over the years, as we brought the practice into the public eye, schools switched from dogs to less popular animals, hoping to mute criticism.

Recently, we knew of just two medical schools that were using animals to teach students—the **University of Tennessee** and **Johns Hopkins University**. Last month, we shared the great news that, after years of pressure from us and recent criticism by Maryland lawmakers, Johns Hopkins finally dropped its animal lab from the surgery clerkship curriculum. Well, that decision had ripple effects. We pushed hard on the University of Tennessee, which decided to follow suit.

**I should clarify that this is the end of animal use in medical school courses. That's a great thing. But animals are still used in more advanced training** (in surgical and emergency medicine residencies, for example), and there is an enormous amount of animal use in basic research, unfortunately. We are continuing to work in those areas as well and are steadily winning those battles.

**But as of now, at every medical school in the United States and Canada, students will get their M.D. or D.O. degrees without ever even being allowed to harm animals.**

Thank you for your dedication to creating a more compassionate future. We could not have achieved this milestone without you.



Sincerely,  
Neal Barnard, M.D., F.A.C.C.  
President, Physicians Committee