

UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

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Mr. Norman Augustine
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Dear Mr. Augustine:

The University of Pennsylvania, School of Veterinary Medicine writes this letter to provide comments and recommendations on the National Center for Research Resources (NCRR) Task Force Straw Model showing the proposed new National Institutes of Health (NIH) homes for current NCRR programs. We recognize the importance of the NIH's initiative to create the National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS), and welcome the potential benefits to our nation's health of an invigorated focus on translational medicine and therapeutics. However, we are concerned that in creating this center that the important missions of the NCRR might be lost if careful consideration is not given to how the current NCRR programs are maintained.

Penn Vet has a strong interest in the future of the NCRR, since our faculty are heavily oriented towards studying animal disease models to advance biomedical research. Thus, most of our studies are supported by NIH research grants. We have a training program for veterinary scientists and maintain the National Referral Center for domestic animal models of human genetic diseases, both of which are funded from the NCRR. As the breeding stock, tissues, cells and other resources are made available to NIH researchers, we provide an important resource towards meeting the goals of translational medicine. Indeed, the emphasis of this work is on studying diseases that are true homologues of human diseases, as the best approach to developing new treatments.

The support we and others receive from the NCRR have made possible important contributions to our nation's health, and it would be optimal to maintain the institute as an independent entity. However, if that is not possible, we are of the opinion that the most effective use of animal research resources would be to keep the elements of the Division of Comparative Medicine (DCM) together. Furthermore, we advocate merging it into the new

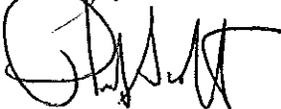
National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences (NCATS). The principal reason is that most of the animal resources supported by DCM are used for translational research, and thus the NCATS would be the most appropriate home for these missions. These resources include the National Primate Research Centers, the Penn Referral Center for Animal Models of Human Genetic Disease, the Missouri National Swine Resource & Research Center, and several rodent resource centers at The Jackson Laboratory and other institutions. The models are used to advance understanding of pathogenesis and as platforms for developing new therapies, including pharmaceuticals, recombinant proteins, organ transplantation, gene therapy, and stem cell approaches. These centers provide animal disease resources to the entire biomedical research community. Keeping DCM within the new NCATS will also help to ensure that the many spontaneous animal diseases similar in pathogenesis and clinical symptomatology to their human counterparts (epilepsy, diabetes, certain cancers, spinal cord injuries, aging disorders) will play their important role in developing new treatments.

The training of veterinarians in biomedical science is also an integral part of the DCM mission. With appropriate scientific training veterinarians bring a valuable perspective of animal physiology and pathology –the twin pillars of medicine – to the scientific research teams and can bridge many practical barriers to conducting translational experiments.

We therefore strongly recommend that if the NCCR is not going to be retained as a functional Institute after reassignment of the CTSA program, that the DCM become part of the new NCATS.

Please do not hesitate to contact us at if we may provide additional information regarding our recommendations on the Straw Model.

Sincerely,



Phillip Scott, PhD
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