Animal rights group attacks LSU rat study

Advocate staff report

An LSU medical researcher criticized by animal rights activists for shooting cats in the head to study brain wounds in 1989 now uses rats in related experiments.

The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, a national animal rights group, ranked Carey's research second on a list of "white coat welfare" projects funded by taxes, the group said.

Dr. Michael Carey, a neurosurgeon at the LSU School of Medicine in New Orleans, said he's been doing the rat studies for more than two years without receiving complaints from the groups that vilified him for the cat project.

Jeff Dorson, executive director of the New Orleans animal rights group Legislation in Support of Animals, said his group had no plans to protest the rat study.

The cat project, funded by the U.S. Army, was suspended after protests led to a federal General Accounting Office inquiry. An LSU Medical Center panel and the medical school's dean reviewed the research and called for the project to resume, but the GAO criticized portions of the experiment and said the decision belonged with the Army.

The Army said it learned a lot about battlefield head wounds from the experiments but did not have the research continued.

Carey said he's now in the middle of a five-year project involving anesthetized rats that studies brain injuries caused by blunt instruments. The Army is paying $1.7 million for the study, he said.

"We're trying to learn how the brain can get better from an injury," he said.

Carey said the research probably won't improve treatment for gunshot wounds, but "animal zealots" have made it impossible to study those injuries.

Carey said he will start experimental drug treatments on the rats within six months.