

Episode: *Author Interview: “Does It Make Sense to Say Humans ‘Protect’ Nonhuman Animals While Using Them to Promote Human Health Interests?”*

Guest: Christopher Lau, MD

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript: Cheryl Green

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[bright theme music]

[00:00:03] TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Author Interview series from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I'm your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative way to access the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Dr Christopher Lau, a second-year pulmonary and critical medicine fellow based in Phoenix, Arizona and co-winner of the Journal's 2023 John Conley Art of Medicine Contest. He's here to discuss his series of drawings, *Animal Heart*, *Man & Animal No. 1*, and *Man & Animal No. 2*, in the September 2024 issue of the Journal, [Nonhuman Animal Research](#). Dr Lau, thank you so much for being on the podcast. [music fades]

DR CHRISTOPHER LAU: Thank you very much, Tim. I appreciate your time.

[00:00:48] HOFF: So, what's the main ethics point that you are making with this series of drawings?

LAU: For my submission, I incorporated three separate drawings, and my goal was that with each drawing, it incorporates elements of both animals as well as human form. And with each subsequent drawing, it kind of reinterprets our relationship with animal testing and human research. And so, the initial illustration was one of animal skulls in the form of a human heart. And the reason for that is that we utilize animal testing pretty much without any sort of thought for the animal's wellbeing. The second illustration incorporates the animal skull in the form of a human head, meaning that there is starting to become more consideration for the animal's welfare. And then the third illustration is kind of integration of both animalistic and human elements, as if we are starting to become more in tune with the welfare of animal testing and animal welfare in order to balance out the benefit and risk and harms done on animal testing for human science.

[00:01:56] HOFF: And what should health professions students and trainees specifically take from these pieces?

LAU: I think the most important lesson to take from it is that science and animal research is not necessarily done in silos. I do think that when we do human research, especially using animal test subjects, oftentimes we think about the human element and the benefits that will come from that research. But at the same time, it is oftentimes at an expense of different, you know, oftentimes the animal test subjects may, you know, their wellbeing and welfare may not necessarily take priority. And so, the goal of it,

hopefully, is to bring to the point that human research is not siloed and that there is a cost, that there is a responsibility that we have in terms of balancing out the wellbeing of our test subjects.

[00:02:50] HOFF: And finally, if you could add a point that you didn't really get to fully explore through these pieces, what would that be?

LAU: Yeah. So, I think the most important point, or one interesting thought that I had while conducting, or drawing, these pieces was oftentimes we would like to think that we're more sophisticated than we are currently in our point in time. In scientific research, we are so far developed now that we now incorporate animal welfare and that we are very cognizant of we have all these processes and standards and procedures in terms of making sure that we have ethical treatments of animals. But I do think that this is a constantly evolving field and that we should always be vigilant of kind of the risk and benefits of animal testing. And that it's not to be taken for granted just because we are now more sophisticated than our ancestors or predecessors. It doesn't necessarily mean that we have conduct-, we have...found a solution. With each generation of scientific testing, I do think that it is an invaluable aspect of human research, but I do think that it is something that we have to constantly reevaluate and reassess. [theme music returns]

[00:03:59] HOFF: Dr Lau, thank you so much for your time on the podcast today, and thanks for your contribution to the Journal this month.

LAU: Thank you very much for having me, Tim.

HOFF: To read the full article, as well as the rest of this month's issue for free, visit our site, journalofethics.org. We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.