Daener says research only hope for disease

By Hon Walker
Emerald Associate Editor

Pamela Daener describes a debate last month with animal rights activists as one of the most distressing experiences of her life.

Speaking in defense of using animals for scientific research, she was dismissed as a "hysterical woman with a dying kid," she said.

Daener's 5-year-old son Chris suffers from muscular dystrophy, and his survival depends on research performed on animals, she said. Chris will die before he turns 20, unless a cure is found, she said.

If animal research were to stop today, Daener said, there would be no hope for Chris, or for anyone with a genetic disease.

"Are you going to sacrifice a few animals to end the suffering, or are you going to let it all go on to save a few animals?" she asked.

Daener, University associate provost for academic affairs, is a member of Incurably Ill for Animal Research. The group is for victims of terminal disease and their family and friends.

She also is president of the local Coalition for Animals and Animal Research, a group that is often at odds with animal rights activists.

During World Laboratory Animal Liberation Week, CFAAR members locally and nationwide have appeared at animal rights rallies to offer another perspective on the increasingly visible and emotional issue.

The group's goals are to educate the public about the nature of animal research and researchers, to support the responsible and humane use of animals in biomedical research, and to promote development and use of alternatives to animals in research.

"It seems like all of the cutting edge of biomedical research is controversial," Daener said.

The majority of such research is performed on animals such as fish or sea slugs, she said, but the loudest protests have opposed the use of "fuzzy animals" such as cats or monkeys, she said.

"A lot of the people in the animal rights movement are very well-meaning," she said.

However, their concerns for animals are resulting in financial and bureaucratic roadblocks, slowing research in areas including muscular dystrophy and AIDS. "The more you slow it down, the more suffering there is," Daener said.

Lab animals are becoming more expensive to obtain, Daener said, and 22 states have passed legislation restricting the types of animals that may be used for experimentation.

In addition, the outcry is causing medical researchers to question their roles in saving the lives of humans, Daener said.

"I find it very frightening," she said. "I see people leaving research in droves. If they have to use animals they don't want to do it."

Tens of thousands of monkeys died for polio research, Daener said, a fact not readily cited by those who oppose future research. A halt to animal research could lead to uncertainty about future cures to other diseases, she said.

"I don't want my daughter to have to fear for her children's lives because the research stopped," Daener said.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, a "very savvy political group," Daener said, was formed before CFAAR was. Their political lobbying is "a serious, major-league threat to research continuing at all," she said.

CFAAR prefers education and lecturing to placards and chanting, Daener said. "We're not a really rowdy group."

Daener's husband Neil is a University biology student. He pointed out that the issue of animal experimentation tends to be portrayed as having two extremes.

Because of this polarization, many people who may support the use of animals for medical research shun a label of "provivisectionist" or the like.

"Anyone who speaks out in favor of research creates an image of the other extreme," he said. However, he said, this is a distortion.

"The other extreme is people absolutely indifferent of animals," he said. "We see ourselves as being in the middle ground."

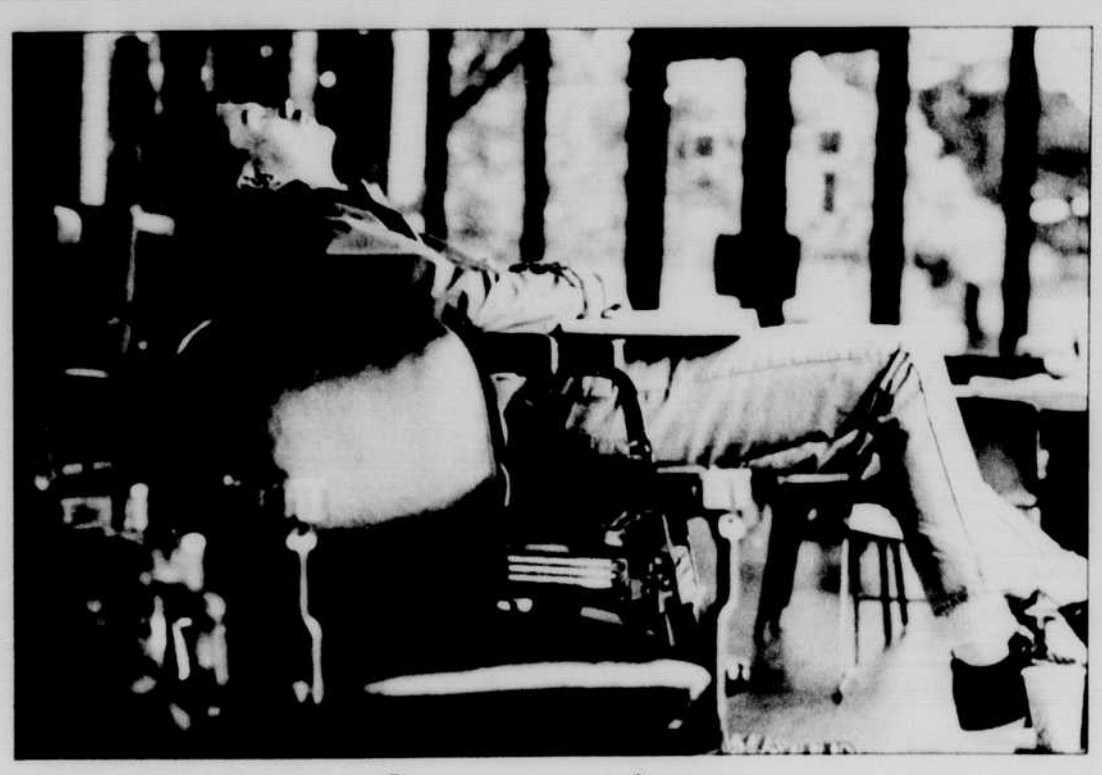
CFAAR member Tracie Bork said with the increased activity of animal rights groups, it is time for those who support biomedical research to educate others.

"The majority of people do think there is a difference between animals and humans," she said. "(Activists) call that speciesism, and I guess it is."

"Our job is to educate the public and let them make up their own minds."

'I don't want my daughter to have to fear for her children's lives because the research stopped.'

— Pamela Daener



Snooze time

University junior Pete Backes catches some sleep in the EMU Skylight while studying for a geology class.

Photo by Mark Ylen

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