

CELEBRATING THE 1ST ASIA LABORATORY ANIMAL DAY: A COMMITMENT TO ETHICAL RESEARCH AND ANIMAL WELFARE

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On September 12, 2024, Professor Dr. Chin Quan, President of the Asian Federation of Laboratory Animal Science (AFLAS), announced that every November 29th would be Asia Laboratory Animal Day (ALAD), a celebration honouring the contributions of laboratory animals to scientific discoveries. The first-ever ALAD celebration in Malaysia was held on November 27, 2024, at the Laboratory Animal Facility and Management (LAFAM), Faculty of Pharmacy UiTM, in partnership with the Laboratory Animal Science Association of Malaysia (LASAM).

The Vice President of the Asian Federation of Laboratory Animal Science, who also serves as the President of the Laboratory Animal Science Association of Malaysia, Dr. John Shia Kwong Siew, officiated Asia Laboratory Animal Day 2024 at LAFAM (Fig 1). In his remarks, Dr. John emphasised the need for responsible practices throughout Asia, the ethical use of animals in scientific research, and the significance of providing adequate care for animals. He reminded us that ALAD offers an important opportunity to not only celebrate the accomplishments of science via animal experimentation but to reflect on the progress we made in advancing animal welfare practices. Dr. John also reaffirmed the importance of laboratory animals in the creation of vaccines, life-saving medications, and medical treatments. From the discovery of penicillin to the development of insulin for diabetes, laboratory animals had made invaluable contributions to human health. And in recent years, laboratory animals had been crucial in the fight against pandemics, including COVID-19, where animal models had played a pivotal role in testing vaccines and understanding viral behaviour.



Fig 1: Dr. John was giving a welcome speech to the audience.

The celebration was followed by a presentation on the 4R's principles in animal-based research by Associate Professor Dr. Hanish Singh Jayasingh Chellammal, who was honoured to be invited to speak on animal ethics and welfare (Fig 2). Dr. Hanish emphasised the importance of striking a balance between the advancement of science and the humane treatment of laboratory animals. In addition to encouraging conversations about the replacement, reduction, refinement, and responsible use of animals in research, ALAD has grown to be a significant event for scientific communities to consider the ethical aspects of their work.



Fig 2: The Four Rs, by Associate Professor Dr. Hanish Singh Jayasingh Chellammal.



Fig 3: Animal Handling and Restraint by Mr. Mohamad Bashir Yaacob, the Assistant Veterinary Officer. Participants were explained on the proper techniques of animal handling and restraint.

THE FUTURE OF LABORATORY ANIMAL WELFARE

As scientific techniques evolve, so too does the approach to laboratory animal welfare. Advances in genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, and organ-on-chip technologies are opening up new possibilities for reducing the reliance on animals in research. For example, *in silico* models (computer simulations) and *in vitro* models (cell-based models) are becoming increasingly sophisticated, offering alternative ways to study disease and test treatments. The continued development of these technologies holds the potential to significantly reduce the number of animals used in research in the future. However, until such alternatives become widely available and effective, laboratory animals will remain an essential component of scientific discovery.

CONCLUSION

Asia Laboratory Animal Day is more than just an observance; it is a call to action for the scientific community, policymakers, and the public to collaborate in the pursuit of ethical and responsible research practices. By celebrating ALAD, we recognise the invaluable contributions that laboratory animals have made to medical science while reaffirming our collective responsibility to ensure their welfare. This day serves as both a reminder and a commitment to conducting research that respects the dignity of all living creatures, fostering a future where science and compassion go hand in hand.

As we look to the future, the commitment to reducing animal suffering, advancing scientific innovation, and ensuring ethical standards in research will continue to shape the landscape of laboratory animal care across Asia and the world.

Happy Asia Laboratory Animal Day!