

March 7, 2025

To the Honorable Members of the Community Review Board and the OHA:

Thank you for your diligence in reviewing the proposed transaction between OHSU and Legacy Health. The March 5, 2015, public meeting discussed the financial problems that are interfering with patient care. Part of the economic solution raised by many speakers was to close OHSU's Oregon National Primate Research Center (ONPRC). ONPRC is sitting on substantial real estate assets that could be put to better use, and its bleak financial future suggests a drain on OHSU's resources. In addition, recent reports suggest that, rather than advancing good scientific inquiry, many ONPRC projects lack justification, waste research resources, and retard professional development. Animal-care deficiencies are even worse than the patient-care deficiencies at OHSU and Legacy, and the center has lost the trust of the public and the state government. Successful closure has been modeled by Harvard's closure of the New England Primate Research Center in 2015. Allow me to provide further details on the benefits of closure and practical steps for consideration.

Financial Benefits

- a. **Better Use of Real Estate Assets.** ONPRC sits on a large parcel of land that is part of a group of adjacent lots owned by OHSU, several miles from its main campus and surrounded by developed neighborhoods. The largest of these lots is 154 acres, whose land alone is valued at approximately \$60 million. Additional lots add about 70 acres and remain largely undeveloped. Combined, the lots' collective value is \$104 million for land alone and approximately \$230 million when structures are included. OHSU is now in the position like that of many companies (e.g., Macy's) whose real estate holdings are worth more than the businesses. Closure of the primate facility will release substantial resources that can be used for patient care and other programs.
- b. **Eliminating Maintenance costs.** Although ONPRC's budget is not reported separately from that of OHSU, the costs of housing approximately 5,000 monkeys and the center's personnel and equipment costs reportedly total roughly \$60 million annually.
- c. **Avoiding Dependency on Dwindling Research Funding.** NIH stopped funding chimpanzee research in 2015, and cuts in research funding overall have begun. In 2025, the federal government announced cuts for payments for indirect costs. While these payments can add 50% to 75% to research income, they will likely be cut to around 15%. While OHSU is the subject of litigation with the federal government to try to stop short-term cuts, longer-term cuts are inevitable. The financial challenges were described by [the Oregonian](#) on February 10, 2025, in an article, entitled *OHSU, Oregon Research Institutions Stand to Lose Millions in Proposed NIH Funding Cuts*:

“...the change would deal a major blow to OHSU, Oregon’s largest recipient of NIH funding. OHSU received \$277 million from the NIH in fiscal year 2024, according to federal data, \$73.6 million of it for indirect costs.”

The federal [lawsuit](#) filed by the State of Oregon points out that the losses will harm the university’s “ability to fund critical facilities, research compliance, and **animal care**” and that it “could immediately and directly impact **patient care**.” Ending dependency on monkey research funding will help prevent further erosion of patient care.

- d. **Boosting Donor Confidence.** Donations and bequests are threatened by continuing revelations of animal-care violations at ONPRC—35 Animal Welfare Act violations since 2014, including highly publicized deaths of monkeys left in a scalding cage washer and forgotten animals allowed to die from protracted dehydration. These revelations were amplified by the Oregon Legislative Assembly’s enactment of unprecedented legislation requiring transparency from OHSU regarding its animal use.

These problems have been further aggravated by public displays of employee anger, including a 2022 protest, described in an [article in Willamette Week](#):

“...disgruntled workers protested what they say are low wages and forced overtime due to short staffing—a recipe, they say, that **could result in dead monkeys**.... Angela Calabrese, an employee at the center for nine years, told *WW*: ‘We’re so short staffed, everyone’s burnt out. We can’t get new people in the door because the starting wage is so low. It’s not competitive. We can’t keep people that have been here long term, because there’s better offers elsewhere. We’re just sort of dwindling.’”

For potential donors and the public, poor animal care is mirrored in poor patient care, and OHSU’s development staff has a hard time convincing donors about the possibility of future “research breakthroughs” when the center cannot even support basic care.

Shifting to Better Research Methods

ONPRC’s methodology—animal experiments—was assigned to it in 1962, and the center has no other purpose. Elsewhere, scientists use animals as a last resort. At ONPRC, experimenters use monkeys when they can make a case for it. That is, rather than standing for the best science, they have conducted studies for which no scientific value is apparent. This has a destructive effect on science and young scientists, who must try to make a less-than-honest case for experiments that lack merit, as recent examples indicate:

- a. **Drugging Pregnant Monkeys.** In a 2025 experiment, researchers gave THC (the psychoactive ingredient in marijuana) to female monkeys, then impregnated them and killed and dissected their babies to show that use of drugs during pregnancy can harm the fetus.¹ This was not news. The CDC already advises avoiding drugs during pregnancy, based on abundant human evidence.

Why were the experiments conducted? The reason may relate to the fact that the first author, Lyndsay E. Shorey-Kendrick, joined ONPRC in 2012, and worked in the laboratory of Dr. Eliot Spindel, doing experiments nearly identical to those done currently. Dr. Spindel’s experiments focused on the

effects of maternal nicotine exposure on infant lung function.² It appears that the junior researcher took over the methods of her mentor, switching from nicotine to THC.

- b. Testing Marijuana Effects on Sperm Quality.** ONPRC experimenters fed THC to adult male rhesus macaques. The monkeys were subjected to “electroejaculation” in special chairs, pictured below.³

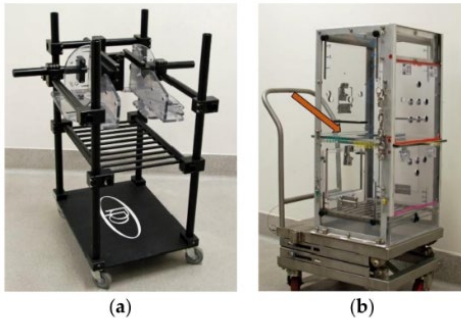


Figure 1. The open restraint chair (ORC; a) and closed box chair (CBC; b). Arrow indicates waist plate modification.

The researchers reported that marijuana extracts may harm fertility and that discontinuing their use may improve fertility.⁴

The experiments are stressful for the animals, who often fight back against laboratory technicians, show signs of continued stress, and, in some cases, never submit to the procedures. In addition, the researchers noted,

“There were several events in which technicians received injuries” in the process of trying to restrain monkeys for these procedures, leading the experimenters to test different confinement methods as well as the use of “negative reinforcement” to force the monkeys into compliance.⁵

It is difficult to make a case for these experiments. Assessments of sperm quality are routinely done in humans during fertility evaluations, and marijuana use has long been known to negatively affect human fertility.^{6,7,8} Nonetheless, the ONPRC researchers announced plans for more monkey experiments in a press release, saying, “Ongoing research efforts will focus on the effects of chronic THC use over long periods of time and through various modes, such as vaping, as well as investigating the impacts of THC on fetal and offspring development.”⁹ These experiments are pending.

- c. Keeping Monkeys on Disease-Inducing Diets.** ONPRC maintains colonies of monkeys who are intentionally kept on unhealthy diets so that the sick monkeys will be available for future experiments. To cause obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, the experimenters “have established two colonies of macaques that are fed a diet high in saturated fat, simple carbohydrates and cholesterol.”

The causes of obesity are intensively studied in humans, with findings that are clinically relevant and of much greater interest to physicians. *The New England Journal of Medicine*, *JAMA*, *The Lancet*, and other leading journals never publish research studies on monkeys or other animals.

The closure of ONPRC will remove a millstone from the neck of OHSU research, allowing OHSU to focus on patient care and, when relevant, research that is fully integrated with clinical care.

Harvard’s Closure of the New England Primate Research Center as a Model for the Oregon National Primate Research Center

In 2015, Harvard closed its New England Primate Research Center, after years of financial and animal-welfare problems. “Driving the decision was the fact that the external funding environment for scientific research has

become increasingly challenging over the past decade. Recent funding pressures have added uncertainty to this already-challenging fiscal context," according to the University. The closure helped Harvard to focus more fully on its academic and research priorities. Harvard's experience provides a model for OHSU to follow its lead. Here are key practical considerations:

- a. **What happens with grants?** OHSU's basic support comes from a five-year renewable NIH grant award P51OD011092, and there are likely specific grants to individual researchers. As Harvard did, OHSU can notify the National Institutes of Health that it elects not to renew its basic grant support for the center. Harvard closed its center over a 24-month transition period. Some of the work of the ONPRC can simply stop within that period. Some can also be transferred to other research centers. In Harvard's case, all work that was in progress when the decision was made to close the center was finished within the transition period or was transferred to other research institutions.
- b. **What happens with employees?** Some ONPRC researchers have other OHSU positions and participate in ONPRC research on a part-time basis. There is also high attrition among ONPRC laboratory workers. In addition, training opportunities can be provided to help employees transition.
- c. **What happens with the animals?** Harvard transferred its surviving primates to sanctuaries, other primate research centers, or zoos. ONPRC could do the same, and this will be a gradual process. In 2022, ONPRC reported conducting about [900 necropsies](#) annually, about one-fifth of its monkeys.
- d. **What sort of announcement is issued?** Refocusing of resources will allow a renewed investment in clinical excellence.
- e. **What should OHSU do with the money it saves after the closure?** Closure will provide financial benefits on several fronts: The land occupied by the center can be sold or developed for other purposes, fixed costs of running the center and maintaining the animals will be eliminated, as will federal fines, the expenses of staff required to oversee animal-welfare compliance, and the costs of dealing with public relations issues and legislative problems resulting from animal welfare violations. As donor trust is restored, donations and bequests that may otherwise be threatened by revelations of animal mistreatment will be more secure.

Thank you for your review. If further details would be helpful, we would be pleased to provide them.

Sincerely,



Neal D. Barnard, MD
President

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