

ANIMAL FACILITY

Isabel Blanco
Core Unit Head

Management
Vivotecnia Management & Services



“The Animal Facility provides CNIO researchers with all the support required to work with mouse models, which are critical to understand the processes involved in tumour generation and development, as well as for the validation of new targets and therapeutic approaches.”

The CNIO has a state-of-the-art Animal Facility, managed by Vivotecnia Management & Services. The Animal Facility's primary responsibility is the supply, husbandry and quality control of laboratory animals used by the Research Programmes in their experimental protocols. The strict compliance to national, EU and international recommendations regarding the use and care of animals in research is of paramount importance to the CNIO.

The high standards achieved by the CNIO with regards to the use and care of animals for experimentation have been recognised by the Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care International (AAALAC), which granted us full accreditation in October 2016. AAALAC International is a private non-profit organisation that promotes the humane treatment of animals in science through voluntary accreditation and assessment programmes. Nearly 1,000 companies, universities, hospitals, government agencies and other research institutions in 44 countries have earned AAALAC accreditation, which is considered one of the top international recognitions in this field.

The CNIO Animal Facility was established to assist researchers in the development and analysis of *in vivo* models. We are currently collaborating with as many as 28 Research Groups, Sections and Units from different Research Programmes.

Our Animal Facility has the capacity to house 19,000 type IIL cages. Our mouse lines are maintained and bred in the Facility's barrier area, which assures Specific Pathogen Free (SPF) health status through a comprehensive health surveillance programme. Microbiological and environmental parameters in the animal areas are constantly monitored. All mouse strains housed in the barrier are either generated within the barrier or introduced by rederivation. We also have an additional area with a capacity for 1,800 type II cages dedicated for the use of non-replicative strains of adenovirus, lentivirus and retrovirus, as well as for xenograft models. In this area, mice are housed in ventilated racks with integration of Individually Ventilated Caging (IVC) units in the building ventilation systems. Mice are always manipulated in Type II biosafety cabins.

Daily operations and husbandry procedures are highly automated in order to safe-guard our personnel from any associated risks; robotic devices perform the potentially hazardous tasks such as the processing of dirty bedding, the washing/filling of cages and bottles, etc. These automated systems maximise the productivity and ensure the quality standards in our washing and sterilising areas. All records concerning breeding protocols and animal inventory are computerised and stored in a web-based application accessible via the CNIO intranet.

The Animal Facility currently harbours more than 40,000 mice representing more than 3,000 genetically modified mouse lines, either as live animals or as cryopreserved embryos or

sperm, carrying close to 400 gene targeted alleles and more than 200 transgenic integrations. The Facility also provides access to more than 50 tool strains, including constitutive and inducible Cre strains, FLP strains, reporter strains, Tet transactivator strains and others. The Animal Facility offers the possibility of running a broad number of experimental procedures in the premises, including the use of gamma irradiation, UV light and volatile carcinogenic agents, as well as surgical procedures, some behavioural studies, a non-invasive blood pressure system, and a lab animal monitoring system (Oxylet) that enables measuring a number of physiological parameters for metabolic profiling and phenotyping of mouse models. Additionally, the monitoring of the mouse models through non-invasive imaging technologies is provided by the Molecular Imaging Core Unit, which has integrated all its image acquisition instruments within the Animal Facility. Likewise, the work of the Transgenic Mice Unit is performed in a laboratory inside the SPF barrier. Finally, the necropsy laboratory is equipped with instruments for the haematological and biochemical analysis of blood and urine, which complement the pathology and clinical diagnostics.

In addition to mice, the Animal Facility hosts over 100 specimens of the *Xenopus laevis* frog that are used to obtain eggs for chromosome dynamics studies. Also, in 2018, as new tools in cancer research, we introduced a colony of rats for 2 specific projects: a project involving the generation of monoclonal antibodies directed against mouse antigens, and an ETP project aimed at testing new compounds against cancer.

All the work carried out by the Animal Facility complies with both national and EU legislation – Spanish Royal Decree RD53/2013 and EU Directive 2010/63/UE – for the protection of animals used for research experimentation and other scientific purposes. Experimental procedures and projects are reviewed and evaluated by the Research Ethics and Animal Welfare Committee of the *Instituto de Salud Carlos III*, as well as by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC). The *Orden ECC/566/2015* stipulates that all animal procedures are to be carried out by qualified people in the possession of the corresponding accreditation as issued by the competent authority. The Animal Facility offers CNIO's new staff a short course focused on the training of personnel performing work with laboratory animals; this is complementary to the online courses that are a requisite to gain access to the facility.

In accordance with our commitment of maintaining the highest possible standards in relation to animal research issues, the CNIO has joined the Agreement on Openness on Animal Research, promoted by the Federation of Scientific Societies in Spain (COSCE) in collaboration with the European Animal Research Association (EARA), which was launched on September 2016. An institutional statement on the use of research animals can be consulted on the CNIO website. ■