

SHORT REPORT

Who is the piglet used in research on newborn and preterm infants?

R Lindemann

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There are many ethical questions concerning research on preterm and newborn infants, why much has to be done on animals. Therefore, research has been, and is continuously done, on newborn lambs, monkeys, pigs, mice, and rats. During the last decades, the use of "piglets" as research animals has become more and more usual. But, what is a piglet, or actually what or who is a piglet?

Doing a search on the database PubMed, more than 2000 articles was found using the term "piglet", the first cited in 1956.¹ Later, the term "newborn piglet" is more often used and is cited more than 1000 times. A newborn pig, however, is cited almost 7000 times.

A search through the presentations at the 2004 Pediatric Academic Societies' Annual Meeting in San Francisco 2004, 25 abstracts used the term "piglet", of which 11 were "newborn piglet", while 15 used the term "newborn pigs".² Therefore, I asked myself, what is actually "a piglet"?

According to the most extensive encyclopaedia, *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (2003 edition), the search word "piglet" is not mentioned at all. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (1995 edition), however, has the piglet as a citation, defined as "a young pig". In *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (1983 edition), piglet is defined as "a small usu. young hog", but neither of the dictionaries defines the piglet as a newborn one. A hog is, however, defined as "a castrated male pig reared for meat", "a domestic swine esp. when weighing more than 120 pounds" (not a very newborn one), or "any of various wild and domestic swine", but could also be "a young unshorn sheep", i.e. not a pig at all!

For most of us dealing with paediatrics, and not to forget the children, Piglet is the good friend of Winnie-the-Pooh, from the books of A. A. Milne. Piglet is first mentioned in chapter III (1926), "In Which Pooh and Piglet Go Hunting and Nearly Catch a Woozle".³ Here, a piglet is defined as "The Piglet", a concrete "individual".

On the basis of these facts, in respect of The Piglet (not a newborn one) and our children, a piglet is still the friendly



companion of Winnie-the-Pooh. The use of "piglet" for research (meaning a newborn pig) should therefore be abandoned.

In the future, please state the age in days of a newborn pig instead of dishonouring The Piglet, until the word "piglet" is officially accepted in science as "a newborn pig".

Correspondence to: R Lindemann, Professor in Neonatology, Director Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, Department of Pediatrics, Ullevål University Hospital, NO-0407 Oslo, Norway; roli@uus.no

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