

Feb. 26, 2015

The Honorable Ashton B. Carter
Secretary of Defense
Office of the Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301

Dear Secretary Carter:

Congratulations on your recent appointment. We appreciate your decades of commitment to this country's service members, and we hope you will continue to serve them well. It is with that in mind that we, former military medical personnel, write you today.

For too long the military's medics and corpsmen have been sent into combat zones without the best training available. For too long the Department of Defense has relied on the use of animals to teach the management of severe battlefield wounds when its own medical experts acknowledged years ago that a transition to human-based models could have already occurred.

Many of us have trained on live animals, and many of us attempted to translate that training in the treatment of human casualties, so we understand the need for modernizing the way military personnel are prepared for the battlefield. The current practice of stabbing, shooting, and amputating the limbs of thousands of pigs and goats each year is far from the best your agency can offer, and the men and women we send into harm's way deserve the best.

As a former professor and trained scientist, you certainly understand the value of using educational methods that best reflect the real-world elements in which trainees will apply their learning. Luckily, training models exist that can overcome the problems presented by the extensive anatomical differences between humans and the species currently used in combat trauma courses. These models—many of which have been developed in conjunction with the Department of Defense—replicate human skin, skeletal structure, and internal organs. They bleed and breathe, and they are rugged enough to be used in field training scenarios.

Such modern methods could have been further advanced and implemented by DOD already. In a December 2009 report sponsored by the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics, which you helmed at the time, a group of military medical experts estimated that all medical procedures commonly taught in combat trauma training courses could be validated by 2014. Yet DOD lags behind this estimation.

We urge you to work quickly to phase in the use of human-based medical training methods in combat trauma courses. We urge you to finish the work you helped start in 2009. Today, members of both the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives will introduce legislation—the BEST Practices Act—to address this issue. We fully support those bills, and we hope you will use your new office to embrace the change that is so badly needed on this issue.

Very respectfully,

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