Why non-animal alternatives?

There are many arguments made about why the use of animals in education might be beneficial. Such arguments include: the merit of “hands on” experience, the development of important manual skills for those who might want to pursue careers in medicine or veterinary medicine, and to “spark” scientific curiosity. Many of these might seem like valid arguments, especially if students are seeking a career in medicine or veterinary medicine.

However, in other countries (such as the UK, India and Israel) animals are not used in high schools, undergraduate education, or for the training of medical surgeons. Instead, students develop their skills using non-animal alternatives or donated human tissues and cadavers.

So, what are the arguments in favour of non-animal alternatives? We’ve outlined a few below:

1) Pedagogical (educational) merit of non-animal alternatives has been shown to be equal to or higher than the use of animals
2) Many non-animal alternatives exist and UBC strives to adhere to the Three Rs principles outlined by national policy
3) Civil liberties of students may be impinged upon; as UBC states that students do not have to use animals as part of their education, yet there is limited support for students or instructors
4) Use of animals in teaching is a cost incurred every term, or year; whereas non-animal alternatives costs are reduced over time as often purchased once
5) Scientific disciplines may lose valuable students to other disciplines that do not use animals
6) The desensitization to animals use can create a culture of research where animals are seen as “tools” or commodities
7) Animals can suffer when restricted in their normal behavior or when caused pain or killed
8) The majority of life sciences students will never use animals in their careers, suggesting that the current practice is of questionable relevance