

SPOTLIGHT ON A SCHOOL

Japanese Veterinary Schools Moving to Use More Alternatives



A Japanese veterinary student works with a DAISIE model during the alternatives tour of veterinary schools

*Makiko Nakano, D.V.M.
Kamakura City, Japan*

The use of alternative methods to harming and killing animals in veterinary instruction has increased remarkably during the past two and a half years in Japan. In December 2001, Dr. Nedim C. Buyukmichi, AVAR's former president, was invited to speak at a symposium on the health and welfare of farm animals in Tokyo and Osaka. During this symposium, Dr. Buyukmichi also gave a keynote speech at an assembly focusing on animal use in veterinary medical education organized by Dr. Atsuko Kobayashi and several veterinary school students. The assembly was very successful, with more than 70 people, both veterinary students and veterinary instructors, in attendance. The assembly served as a trigger to students who were interested in promoting the use of alternatives in veterinary instruction. Following the assembly, in September 2002, students from veterinary schools started communicating with each other regularly via e-mail and subsequently developed an e-mail list regarding alternatives in education. This e-mail list now has more than 80

members, including both veterinary students and veterinarians from all over Japan. In addition, the Web site of InterNICHE Japan, which promotes the use of alternatives, was created, and the circle of Japanese students who are interested in alternatives continues to grow. The students now conduct study meetings on alternative methods at various universities every few months. During the Spring of 2003 Eriko Goto and Kaisaku Oota, who are veterinary students from Nippon University and Kitazato University respectively, played a central role in organizing an exhibition of alternative methods at Japanese veterinary medical schools. Goto and Oota obtained a variety of equipment and materials used for alternative methods of instruction, which were on loan from InterNICHE, and traveled to fifteen veterinary schools and to the conference of the Japanese Society of Veterinary Science.

This exhibition was extremely successful with many instructors and students providing positive feedback. The results of a questionnaire about alternatives distributed during the exhibition have been collected and made into a booklet, with several hundred copies already being distributed. Additionally, the Japanese Society of Alternatives to Animal Experiments has focused on the issue of alternative methods in education during the past several years. Last year, Ms. Rhoko Haraguchi, a veterinary student of Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology, requested alternative methods in a practical surgery course, obtained approval to use them, and received credit for this course without killing any animals. Her successful example resulted in alternative methods being used in surgical practice for all 40 veterinary

students this year. Instead of killing animals, the students practiced with the Dog Abdominal Surrogate for Instructional Exercises (DASIE) and other animal surgical models. This marks a milestone in Japan. Some instructors in veterinary schools also have started making efforts to decrease, as much as possible, the number of animals killed in instruction. For example, the Humane Society Program at Kagoshima University has been moving to use alternative methods, and Gifu University started a surgical program, in cooperation with the Japanese Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, using stray cats from the area, whom were surgically sterilized and returned to the shelter for adoption.

Based on the success of the past few years, it is predicted that the use of alternatives to the harming and killing of animals in veterinary instruction will continue to increase in Japanese veterinary schools. On a personal note, I have been struggling to promote the use of alternatives since my days as a veterinary student four years ago. I am very happy to see this progress. I deeply appreciate the efforts of individuals such as Dr. Buyukmichi and representatives of InterNICHE, who provided encouragement in this regard. Moving forward, I think new students will raise more questions and continue to improve the current situation, meaning that fewer animals will be harmed and killed in veterinary instruction.

Editor's note: Dr. Nakano graduated from Azabu Veterinary College in Sagami-hara, Japan, in March 2000. She is the Japanese contact for InterNICHE. This article was translated by Shoko Obara, also a veterinarian in Japan.

AVAR is Plaintiff in Lawsuit Against Sacramento County, California County Violated Agreement Regarding Pound Seized Animals

A lawsuit was filed in March against Sacramento County for failing to protect and keep track of animals sold for research and teaching from the county's animal shelter to the University of California, Davis (UCD), and Sutter Hospital. Sacramento County is the last county in the state of California which still allows sales of unclaimed companion cats and dogs for research and teaching from its shelter.

In 1986 a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreement was adopted by the county as a result of public concern regarding the practice of "pound seizure," whereby adoptable yet unclaimed animals are sold from the shelter for various medical and educational uses. In order for animals to be purchased and then used for research and/or teaching, the purchasers agreed to comply with various requirements set forth by the county. Those requirements include keeping records, ensuring the animals are not used in duplicative procedures, complying with local, state, and federal laws, and

keeping animals free from avoidable stress. For 18 years, almost every requirement of the MOU has been violated.

Humane organizations oppose the practice of selling companion animals for these purposes. Many believe that a shelter is supposed to be a place where animals can be found if lost or are adopted when they have been abandoned. Selling them creates distrust in the community and leaves open the possibility that a lost companion could end up being used for research or teaching. The practice of purchasing unwanted or unclaimed animals for research or teaching does not reflect a concern for the well-being of animals by the veterinary profession. It should be doing more to prevent overpopulation and the resulting unwanted animals instead of taking advantage of the situation.

AVAR, as well as the Animal Protection Institute and In Defense of Animals, the other plaintiffs in the lawsuit, have tried for years to get the policy of

selling animals by Sacramento County changed. AVAR has worked to convince UCD to stop purchasing shelter animals for veterinary training. Most of the hundreds of animals sold each year were used in terminal procedures. In the last year, however, UCD School of Veterinary Medicine has made substantial changes to its curriculum, making pound-seized animals unnecessary to its training of veterinary students. UCD continues to purchase animals for research.

Sutter Hospital uses dogs in studies on heart devices and uses kittens to train nurses in neonatal intubation training, this despite the fact that other hospitals in the area do not use live animals for this purpose and that models are available.

The lawsuit calls for the county to end the MOU and discontinue the sales of animals. It also seeks damages for the animals sold illegally which will go toward free and low-cost sterilization of community animals. The county has 30 days to respond.