

# Interview with an IACUC Member

In the winter 2007 edition of the *Alternatives in Veterinary Medical Education* newsletter, readers were introduced to the IACUC (Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee). In this issue, we look more specifically at the IACUC at Western University of Health Sciences in Pomona, California. Vanessa Rizzo (DVM 2009), president of the AVAR student chapter at WesternU, met with Dr. Donald Walters, who is the chair of WesternU's IACUC. She interviewed him about his perspective and role on an IACUC.

## **Rizzo: What is the purpose of the IACUC?**

**Walters:** To ensure that any research, testing, or teaching involving the use of animals is scientifically justified and performed in a humane manner with the fewest number of animals that will provide scientifically valid results.

## **Rizzo: Describe your specific role and responsibilities as a member of the IACUC, including how this relates to the veterinary curriculum at your university.**

**Walters:** As the chair of an IACUC, it is my responsibility to ensure that all animal use protocols are thoroughly reviewed to meet the requirements of all applicable laws and guidelines. I also mediate disputes between investigators and the IACUC, arrange training for committee members, investigators, and staff as necessary, schedule meetings, and conduct semiannual inspections in collaboration with other committee members.

The existence of the IACUC is mandated by the Animal Welfare Act (AWA), which also outlines the makeup and responsibilities of the committee. Our veterinary students are educated on the AWA and the roles of the IACUC in their Veterinary Issues course during their first or second year and again during a two-week rotation in Laboratory Animal Medicine during their third year. These courses go in-depth on the AWA and the role of the IACUC.

## **What are the biggest challenges you face as a member of the IACUC?**

Our biggest problem is finding faculty who are not only willing to serve on the IACUC but who can actually show up for meetings and do their fair share of reviewing protocols.

Without a quorum, protocols cannot be reviewed. This can effectively bring someone's research program to a halt and possibly affect their funding and even their career.

Another very real problem is getting investigators to respond to the concerns of the IACUC in a timely fashion following committee review of their protocols. Occasionally, this has resulted in the IACUC withdrawing protocols from further consideration, thus requiring the investigator to resubmit. Obviously, this delays the investigator, and they generally are not happy about that. Nevertheless, the IACUC has taken a strong stance.

## **Describe a specific experience you have had while serving on the IACUC where an IACUC decision or action has resulted in positive changes that improved animal care or reduced harmful animal use at your university.**

Not many situations have arisen, but we have, following considerable deliberations, decided to no longer allow CO<sub>2</sub> asphyxiation of any animal without substantial scientific justification, as it is the committee's position that this practice is inhumane.

## **Explain what type of impact the IACUC can have on veterinary curricula.**

Our IACUC has jurisdiction over the use of all animals on campus for research or teaching. It, therefore, does have the authority to allow or not allow terminal surgeries for any purpose, including in the training of veterinary students. It is our understanding that WesternU's veterinary school does not wish to use terminal surgeries for training and no such protocols have been submitted to the IACUC for consideration. We are delighted

to know that appropriate veterinary training can be achieved without the use of terminal surgeries. Since this has been established, if such a request was made, extraordinary justification would be required for IACUC approval. Although the IACUC does not have final say, it must work in a cooperative and professional manner with all colleges and schools to guarantee not only the humane care and use of animals but also the needs of society. So, yes, IACUCs can have a positive impact on the design of veterinary curricula that takes into consideration the three R's.

## **What advice or recommendations would you give to veterinary students who are considering IACUC service in the future?**

Keep in mind that, at least for the foreseeable future, animals will continue to be used in scientific research and teaching. Although it is the IACUC's job to ensure justifiable and humane use of animals, it is not the job of the IACUC to unjustifiably impede such activities. Veterinarians and veterinary students can serve animals best by getting involved and understanding the "what" and "why" of what scientists are trying to achieve through the use of animals. Only then can they help investigators discover better ways to achieve their goals that hopefully will someday negate the use of animals for teaching, testing, or research.

*I would like to thank Dr. Walters for taking time out of his busy schedule to discuss the IACUC at Western University. I would also like to thank Vanessa Rizzo for meeting with and interviewing Dr. Walters.*

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