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ALTERNATIVES

IN VETERINARY MEDICAL EDUCATION



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Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights

Meet ... The IACUC Participating in Decisions Regarding Animal Care and Use

Veterinary medical professionals are uniquely positioned to make positive changes on behalf of animals used in education, research, or testing. All veterinary medical students, for example, work directly with animals during their education, and some students participate in animal research or testing. The unique relationship and experience with animals makes veterinary professionals qualified to assist with decisions on animal use and care, as well as to scrutinize training methods where animals are involved. This first article in a series on the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) will introduce the facts about this compliance committee and perhaps empower some readers to take an active role in it and become involved in various IACUC issues.

According to the Animal Welfare Act and Regulations (AWA), any institution operating under United States laws where live vertebrate animals are used for research, testing, or education, is required to establish an Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), with the exception of elementary or

secondary schools. This committee is charged with oversight and evaluation of all aspects of an institution's animal care and use program. This includes:

- 1) Reviewing the animal care and use program;
- 2) Inspecting animal care facilities;
- 3) Investigating complaints about animal care;
- 4) Reviewing animal use protocols;
- 5) Developing institutional policies regarding animal use;
- 6) Participating in the development and implementation of training programs; and,
- 7) Maintaining records pertinent to these activities as required by law.

According to the AWA, an IACUC must have a minimum of three members. However, the Public Health Service Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals (PHS Policy) from the Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare (OLAW) with the National Institutes of Health (NIH), which oversees animal activities at institutions receiving any

public monies, requires at least five members, including:

- one veterinarian with training or experience in laboratory animal science and medicine, who has direct or delegated authority and responsibility for activities involving animals at the institution;
- one practicing scientist experienced in research with animals;
- one member whose primary concerns are in a nonscientific area (e.g., ethicist, lawyer, member of the clergy); and
- one member who is not affiliated with the institution other than as a member of the IACUC.

IACUC's meet regularly and report, through their Institutional Official, to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), as well as to the OLAW when an *Animal Welfare Assurance* is in effect. (The *Assurance* is a commitment made by the institution stating that it will comply with the PHS Policy, with the *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals*, and with the AWA and regulations. It includes a description of the institution's program for animal care and use, and designates the institutional official responsible for compliance.) The USDA makes two unannounced inspections a year at each facility, and the OLAW makes one announced inspection per year. Either can make requests

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Meet ...The IACUC

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for suspension of federal support for research (including the use of animals in education) if there are violations. It is the job of the IACUC to ensure appropriate compliance with regulations and the OLAW Assurance that such animal care and use is held to the highest standards.

With its various responsibilities for animal care oversight and protocol review, the IACUC is in the unique position to not allow or to discontinue animal use when the procedures may violate the AWA; with its responsibilities for policy development and training oversight, the IACUC can be an instrument of progress toward satisfying the three Rs: 1) Replacement: the substitution of insentient material for conscious living animals; 2) Reduction: the reduction in the numbers of animals used to obtain information of a given amount and precision; and 3) Refinement: any decrease in the incidence or severity of inhumane procedures applied to animals being used.

So how can you, as a new veterinary professional, become involved in this important work? Learning by doing is often the most satisfying means by which to grow professionally; just as a law student may clerk for a judge, a veterinary student can shadow and assist an IACUC member with their duties. This reciprocal relationship offers an excellent opportunity to learn while offering much-needed service to this often heavily burdened committee. Protocol review often requires extensive investigation into techniques to achieve the 3R principles. Therefore, you can advance the welfare of animals and the caliber of science with your service to this committee.

To learn more about activities involving animal use at your institution, you can attend IACUC meetings (if and when they are open), review your institution's Animal Care Program (often on the institution's Web site), as well as review standing protocols and IACUC meeting minutes. As an informed individual, you are better able to participate in animal care and use issues that exist at your institution or your alma mater. This type of review would be an excellent activity for student research clubs and animal welfare/rights clubs. Consult with your faculty

advisors, the IACUC chairperson, and/or the public information office at your institution for access to documents.

Editor's Note: Interviews with IACUC members will be featured in the next issue of *Alternatives in Veterinary Medical Education*.

Resources

- Animal Welfare Act <http://www.nal.usda.gov/awic/legislat/usdaleg1.htm>
- PHS Policy <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/olaw/tutorial/index.htm>
- The Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals <http://www.nap.edu/readingroom/books/labrats/>
- IACUC.org (information resource/link archive for members and staff of IACUCs) <http://iacuc.org/>
- Animal Welfare Information Center (resource for employee training and the promotion of the humane care and use of animals through alternatives) <http://awic.nal.usda.gov>
- AltWeb (global clearinghouse for information on alternatives to animal testing) <http://altweb.jhsph.edu/index.htm>

Students as Animal Advocates

Hello, everyone!

Welcome to the Students as Animal Advocates column. I am Zarah Hedge, your new student editor for AVAR's *Alternatives in Veterinary Medical Education* newsletter. I am currently a second-year veterinary student at Western University of Health Sciences, as well as the vice president of our AVAR Student Chapter and president of the Shelter Medicine Club. I am very excited by this new position and column.

We envision this column as a means of informing others of what students are doing as animal advocates at their schools and in their communities. This will be a great opportunity for open dialogue between all of us so that we can help each other and work together to benefit animals. In each newsletter, we will focus on the activities being accomplished at veterinary schools on behalf of animals. We will also include an Activist Alert – information on a current animal issue that needs YOU as an advocate!



Zarah Hedge with her dog, Pez.

As we move forward, we will build a database for student networking with contact information for representatives from different schools – veterinary schools, veterinary technician programs, and undergraduate universities and colleges. Please keep me informed of your activities so that I can include them in each newsletter. Email me information about events and projects. Include pictures, as well. We are open to any ideas for the direction of this column. I firmly believe that, as individuals, we can make a big difference in the world. By working together, we will be able to accomplish so much more. With this column, I hope to achieve just that.

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AVAR's Alternatives Newsletter Gets New Editor

Lara Rasmussen, DVM, MS, DACVS, is the new editor for *Alternatives in Veterinary Medical Education* newsletter. She takes over for Susan Krebsbach, DVM, our loyal editor for the past eight years.

Dr. Krebsbach moves on to a thriving private practice in veterinary behavior. Dr. Rasmussen, now practicing private small animal specialty surgery in Minnesota, also maintains an adjunct appointment with Western University of Health Sciences College of Veterinary Medicine in California after working six years there to develop the clinical skills and service learning components of the new school. Dr. Rasmussen graduated from the University of California School of Veterinary Medicine, at which time she was one of the first students to request an education that did not harm or kill animals.



Dr. Lara Rasmussen with her dog, Duncan Heinz.