

Former Student Finds Sanctuary Home for Pig Used for Surgery Training



Picture above: Dr. Brenda Forsythe with Brenda Grace. Photo courtesy of Dr. Forsythe.

Brenda Forsythe, Ph.D., D.V.M., a 1998 graduate of University of California School of Veterinary Medicine, sought and obtained permission to find a sanctuary home for a pig (Brenda Grace) used in her third-year surgery course. The pigs used in the course were from a "pork" producer and had naturally occurring hernias, which were repaired by the students. Normally, they were returned to the producer. The course also involved terminal surgeries on horses. Forsythe said she regrets participating in the terminal procedures on the equines but there was no other option at the time. She later wrote and sought approval for an "Alternative Surgical Protocol" using a combination of ethical-source equine cadavers and actual equine colic surgery participation at the veterinary hospital. (This protocol is on file at UC Davis with Dr. John Pascoe and can be requested by students interested in pursuing an alternative surgical training course.) "My advice to other veterinary students who want to treat their large animal patients more humanely is that you should listen to your conscience."

University of Wisconsin Body Donation Program Replicated at Undergraduate Level

The University of Wisconsin (UW) School of Veterinary Medicine formalized its willed body donation program in 2003, creating a network of participating veterinary clinics to provide ethical source cadavers for training. The program now provides about 40 percent of the dogs used at the school and 10 percent of the cattle and horse cadavers used in training, according to an AVAR survey conducted this fall.

Spurred by the success of that program, the nearby University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point campus recently created a body donation program of its own to supply cadavers for undergraduate course work. The donated cadavers are used for Animal Physiology and Wildlife Diseases courses in the Department of Biology and the College of Natural Resources.

Dr. Isabelle Girard, an animal physiologist with the Department of Biology, said she initiated the UW-Stevens Point program because she wanted a more ethical source for cadavers than commercial breeding facilities. Girard said the UW-Stevens Point program may be the only body donation program in the United States that provides cadavers for undergraduate training. (There are at least seven U.S. veterinary schools which have official willed body donation programs.)

Girard said UW-Stevens Point used the UW veterinary school brochure, consent form and other materials to develop the program. To initiate the Stevens Point program, the school contacted local veterinarians and gave short talks during clinic meeting hours. They now have three clinics, representing 10 veterinarians, participating in the program. From those clinics, UW-Stevens Point receives about 65 donated animal bodies to be used as cadavers per year; 50 percent are dogs, 40 percent are cats and 10 percent are other small animals like guinea pigs, rats and birds. Girard said this is more than enough to meet their needs, although they could accept more cadavers if they had more freezer space.

Girard said the clinics usually provide medical information about the animals donated through the program. This offers additional learning opportunities for the students, particularly when the veterinarians haven't been able to come to a conclusive diagnosis prior to euthanasia. (If the students discover information pertinent to the cause of death, they relay that information back to the veterinarian.) Having background information on each animal also helps them identify with the animal. Many of the students in the biology courses are pre-vet or pre-med.

Girard said an auxiliary benefit of the program is that some local veterinarians have been able to use the donated cadavers for continuing education purposes. For example, if a veterinarian needs to practice a new technique for eye surgery, he or she can request to use a donated cadaver prior to dissection by the students. Girard said several veterinarians have taken advantage of this opportunity. In addition to giving the veterinarians the practice they are looking for, this type of arrangement means animals will not be purchased from commercial breeders or other sources, like shelters, for continuing education training.

AVAR to Exhibit at 2005 SAVMA

AVAR will host a booth at the 2005 SAVMA (Student American Veterinary Medical Association) Symposium.

The event takes place at Texas, A&M University College of Veterinary Medicine in College Station, Texas from March 10-12, 2005. This is the second year in a row that AVAR will be at SAVMA. Please stop by to say hello if you're attending.