

## IVMA One Welfare Article: Animals used in Education

First, I feel that I must disclose that I am Buckeye in Boilermaker Land. So, while my individual experience may have been at a different Big 10 school, I believe that there are more commonalities than differences in our veterinary medical training. One of these is the use of animals in teaching students the art and science of veterinary medicine and surgery. The use of animals in teaching and training can raise ethical concerns centered on the welfare of the animals, whether there is a benefit to that animal or others, and the sources and fates of the animals, among an array of other possible issues.

So many well-intentioned yet misinformed people campaign (both formally and informally – think of the power of some social media posts!) against the use of animals in teaching; they may also misconstrue animal welfare into animal rights. If you visit the AVMA's Animal Welfare page ([www.avma.org/kb/resources/reference/animalwelfare/pages/animal-welfare-students.aspx](http://www.avma.org/kb/resources/reference/animalwelfare/pages/animal-welfare-students.aspx)) welfare is defined as *how animal is coping with the conditions in which it lives*. So we must ask ourselves if the animals used in teaching are safe, comfortable, well-nourished and able to express innate behaviors. From what I have seen at teaching hospitals across North America, the answer is an overwhelming YES! First, animals used solely for teaching are included in an animal care and use protocol that is approved by the University's Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC). This safeguards the care and transport of the animals. Secondly, vet students are so excited to (finally) have the opportunity to work on live animals and perform injections, intubations, epidurals, procedures, etc. that the animals are treated with a great deal of kindness, respect and appreciation. Additionally, students learn so much from the cases seen in the clinic, from client-owned animals, which could also be considered teaching animals. These may be clients who fall in the well-intentioned yet misinformed category. I think this is where we, as practicing veterinarians, must take advantage of the opportunity for conversation and open dialogue. Information is powerful, and if we are not capitalizing on chances to educate, inform and influence, we have no force with which to defend our training or our alma maters.

While some teaching animals are temporarily housed at the teaching hospital and some are the clinical cases, there are some resident animals at teaching hospitals (who also fall under the supervision of the IACUC). I am smiling widely now recalling fond memories of them – they all had names, individual personalities and loved attention from the students. Brooks and Dunn were two castrated Lamancha goats that could have been the Food and Fiber Animal Hospital's mascots. They gave blood when needed for parasitized, anemic goats and plasma for kids with failure of passive transfer of immunity. They were halter-broke, so they were excellent for leading reluctant small ruminants to procedure areas. They may have also been just a little chubby from all of the love and treats they received – peppermints and fresh fruit, especially oranges, were some of their favorites. Brooks and Dunn lived together in a large horse stall that was cleaned every day, they always had fresh hay and water, they were taken for walks regularly, and they went outside to graze often. I don't know how you could argue that these animals, which were used in teaching, did not have an excellent state of welfare. The benefits (life-saving, stress-reducing) that they provided to the other animals in the hospital – patients and humans – are undeniable and came at no real sacrifice.

So from where do these teaching animals come? Where do they go when they leave the teaching hospital? The short answer is, "It depends." I see a lot of beauty and flexibility in that answer, for not all animal used in teaching are destined to the same fate. Companion animals usually come from a local rescue or humane society. And, they usually return to that organization for adoption....usually. When they do not return, it's because they found a loving, forever home with an unsuspecting vet student who fell head-over-heels for his/her surgery dog. That is a beautiful thing. Having finished vet school almost 10 years ago, many of my classmates are having to say sad good-byes to their beloved, furry friends that joined their families after their spay or neuter surgery. Sure, the surgery took a lot longer than what we are capable of doing now, but there must be a first for everything. The intervening good years and lessons learned on how to be a better surgeon make those adoptions even more special. For livestock species, they are sourced from local farms and sale barns. These are animals that were bred to be production animals and enter the food chain. And, after a brief stint moonlighting as a teaching animal and respecting any withdrawal periods, they finish their life as production animals. Putting American-raised food on the table of hungry Americans is not a shameful thing, nor should it ever be. Our agricultural industry is vital to our communities and our country; training veterinarians to provide for the health of food animals and safety of our food supply is not optional.

The IVMA's Animal Welfare committee endorses eight INVMA One Welfare Principles. If you have not read them lately, you should ([www.invma.org/?page=AnimalWelfareCommi](http://www.invma.org/?page=AnimalWelfareCommi)). The appropriate use of animals in teaching and research respects all eight of these principles. In the next issue, the One Welfare Initiative article will explore the hot-button topic of animal use in research. As a final thought, I challenge the veterinary community with this: Do we ever really stop being a student? Or a teacher? If we are not learning from the work we do every day, from our clients and patients (this technically makes them teaching animals), and if we are not transferring some of those golden nuggets of wisdom and experience to technicians, colleagues and clients, what are we doing?