

is another—outside the scope of this column, but still worth considering to avoid potential legal entanglement in the future. The grants management office may consider legal review by the Great Eastern University team to avoid potential future liability.

1. Public Health Service. *Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals* (US Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, DC, 1986; revised 2015).
2. Animal Welfare Act regulations. CFR 9, Chapter 1, Subchapter A.
3. Institute for Laboratory Animal Research. *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals* 8th edn. (National Academies Press, Washington, DC, 2011).

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RESPONSE

Memorandum of understanding

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Invertebrates are not generally covered by IACUC policy and oversight. There are cases wherein, if used in conjunction with vertebrates, they can fall under the IACUC’s purview. AAALAC International has published a webpage of frequently asked questions, which specifically addresses this occasional inclusion of invertebrates¹. However, they make a point of only including invertebrates when colonies are housed within animal facilities, when higher level invertebrates are used, or when invertebrates make up a major portion of a unit’s research mission. The described scenario does not seem to be on the scale that AAALAC implies.

The scenario, as presented, lacks some information that is relevant to the question of how to proceed. Why does Montfort need ticks that have recently been attached to animal? The answer to this question could determine the need for IACUC oversight of the work. If the goal is a general survey of active tick populations that affect the local pet and human populations, then this could be set up as a simple case of professional collaboration. If the goal is to obtain the blood meal from the tick, the study could be interpreted as tissue collection and thus fall under IACUC policy.

A word from USDA and OLAW

In response to the questions posed in this scenario, the United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Animal Care (USDA, APHIS, AC) and the Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare (OLAW) offer the following guidance:

In this scenario, the dogs are under the care of a private practice veterinarian. State veterinary practice acts require a valid Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR) under which the veterinarian is held responsible for the health and well-being of the client’s animal¹. A pet that receives care pursuant to a valid VCPR is not considered an animal² used or intended to be used for research, testing and experimentation. Such care includes but is not limited to routine vaccinations, surgery and medical treatment. The collection of samples and data under these circumstances does not make the activity subject to oversight under the Animal Welfare Act.

The PHS *Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals* covers live vertebrate animals used or intended for use in research, research training and biological testing activities conducted or supported by the PHS³. Veterinary clinical care of a privately owned animal is not a research activity and does not require IACUC approval⁴. In the scenario, the investigator’s research involves the ticks collected during routine veterinary clinical care, and the dogs are not being handled in response to the requirements of the NIH grant. The investigator has mistakenly indicated on the application that the activities involve research with live vertebrate animals and has completed the Vertebrate Animals Section. To rectify the situation, the investigator should contact the NIH extramural program official and grants management specialist managing the grant and inform them of the error. The program official and grants specialist will consult with OLAW and change the coding of the application to reflect no use of vertebrate animals. Verification of IACUC approval is not required.

1. American Veterinary Medical Association. Veterinarian-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR) FAQ. <https://www.avma.org/public/PetCare/Pages/VCPR-FAQs.aspx> (accessed 1 June 2016).
2. Animal Welfare Act Regulations. 9 CFR, Chapter 1, Subchapter A, Part 1, Section 1.1
3. Public Health Service. *Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals*. (US Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, DC, 1986; amended 2002).
4. Public Health Service. Frequently Asked Questions – Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals. Applicability of the PHS Policy, Question A8. *Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare, US Department of Health and Human Services* <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/olaw/faqs.htm#528> (2006; revised 2016).

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If Montfort’s work triggers the Great Eastern University IACUC’s policy on tissue collection, a simple protocol would suffice, serving to document appropriate practices of acquisition, use and disposal of vertebrate tissue and addressing occupational health and safety issues. This type of protocol would stand as a matter of record and would not require inspection of the premises of private veterinary practices.

If the research focuses on the tick itself, then a memorandum of understanding between the collaborating veterinarians and Great Eastern University would provide safeguards for all parties without increasing the administrative burden on the project’s participants. Since all handling will occur off-site by licensed veterinarians

or veterinary technicians working in private practice on privately owned pets, and since the pets will not be housed at Great Eastern University or handled by university personnel, the institutional collaboration policy would cover this research. A memorandum of understanding should be drafted between the private practice veterinarians and Great Eastern University outlining the responsibilities of all parties, particularly in relation to establishing requirements for notifying pet owners or obtaining their consent, approving humane methods of removing ticks from the dogs, and upholding appropriate practices of acquiring and handling ticks with due consideration of occupational health and safety concerns

