

Bruce W. Kennedy, MS, RLATG, CMAR, CPIA, Column Coordinator



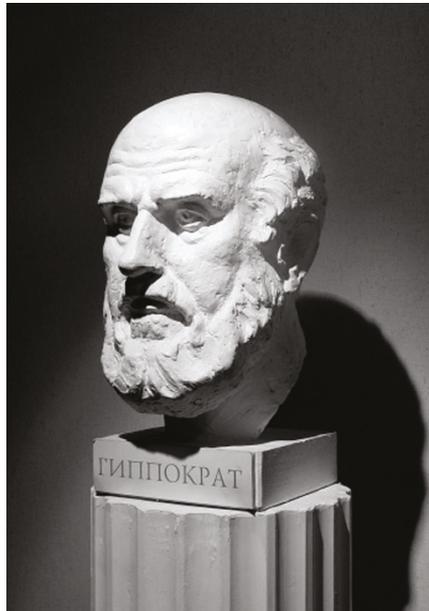
'Do no harm' in training

Laboratory animal science is a field that often and effectively borrows technology, information and talents from other disciplines. And trainers are always coming up with innovative ways to teach facts and skills in animal research. As an example, I, being in the education field as well as practicing research technology, find many ideas and practices in education journals.

In a September 2014 issue of *Education Week*, a weekly publication for school teachers, a column titled “Do no harm’: A Hippocratic Oath for Schools” (<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/09/03stewart.h34.html>) caught my eye. Because I work in the biomedical research field, am active in the organization Laboratory Animal Welfare and Training Exchange and teach at my university, the blend of the ethical code for physicians with kindergarten through high school education made me curious about what the author, Courtney Stewart, had to say. I was hooked when I read the first paragraph: “While some might argue that there is little connection between medicine and education, there are lessons that educators can learn from this very different field if you look for them.” My gosh, that’s just what we do in lab animal science—we often look outside our field in order to improve our work with animals.

I began to think about the ethics associated with human medicine, animal research and education in the sense of ‘do no harm’ to the recipients of these labors. Certainly, all three embody the concept of welfare, whether of people, animals or school children.

In fact, the phrase ‘do no harm’ does not appear in the Hippocratic Oath, which instead contains the phrase “to abstain from doing harm.” The origin of ‘do no harm’ is not known, but by one account (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hippocratic_Oath), it is attributed to a 19th century British surgeon, Thomas Inman, who may himself



Philip Sigin-Lavdanski/Stock/Thinkstock

have used animals in his training (*Nigerian J. Surg. Res.* 7, 260–267; 2005). Even more curious, as I learned when I delved into this, there is some discussion as to whether Hippocrates actually wrote the Oath that bears his name. It might have been one of his students (<http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=20909>). And today, there are many modernized versions of the document (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/body/hippocratic-oath-today.html>), all of which hold health care to high standards. I’m in agreement with Stewart that the concept of the Oath can apply to education as well.

Stewart’s column presents the consideration that medicine often treats one patient at a time, whereas a classroom has many students in it, all being taught together. Stewart, a professor of instructional leadership, argued that teachers, like physicians, should focus more attention on individuals. That statement carried some training ‘weight’ with me, more so because Stewart speaks from both disciplines,

being a former middle and high school science teacher. Consequently, I would like readers to ask themselves whether placing more focused attention on their individual students—be they medical doctors learning animal research, veterinarians learning a new procedure or grown-up school children recently hired to be animal care providers—would make a marked difference in animal care and pass rates on competency tests.

By failing to focus on the individual, trainers might even be doing a type of harm. Let me elaborate. Failure to pay attention to an individual’s needs during training could lead to him not learning the material needed to do his job well, which could lead to an animal not receiving appropriate care during a procedure. Failure to pay attention to an individual’s needs could also lead to him dropping out of training, an undesirable result in animal facilities as in educational institutions. Regular readers of this column will recall that the father of adult learning, Professor Malcolm Knowles, told us to think about the motivations and readiness of the more mature student.

Regrettably, yet realistically, in both medicine and education there will be failures. Stewart discusses this, saying that they cause harm and they stigmatize but they also present an opportunity for learning. Research is a forever opportunity to learn. We do it because we don’t know something and want to find the answer. Albert Einstein said, “If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research, would it?” (<http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/a/alberteins148837.html>). We must treat our mistakes as learning opportunities. By improving our teaching methods, looking to other fields for ideas and focusing on individual students, we can minimize mistakes. We, too, in lab animal training can aim to ‘do no harm’. That is an ethical code that all of us concerned with the health and welfare of animals can ascribe to and recite.