Letter to the Editor

Dealing with IACUC Dysfunction

To the Editor:

Although the “Protocol Review” scenario, “The Case of the (Over) Zealous IACUC Member”, in the September 2003 issue (32(9), 18–19) posits that Chow is well-meaning, people who are willing to dominate other people’s time in this way are usually not well-meaning but are egotists who derive a sense of power from their obstructive behavior. An IACUC that regularly has 5- to 6-hour meetings is dysfunctional, and if that dysfunction is traceable to one individual, something must be done about that individual. Make no mistake; the animal rights folks foresaw this tendency of scientists and academics to bog down in endless discussion, and they considered the IACUC review process to be a mechanism to impede animal research. Anybody who plays into their hands is a fool or worse.

That said, I agree with the commentators who considered the IACUC Chair’s attempt to muzzle Chow inappropriate. Apparently, this IACUC has a procedure whereby a member pre-reviews a protocol, then presents it to the full Committee. I would suggest that the IACUC (or the Chair) impose a rule that a protocol will not be presented until the pre-reviewer considers it approvable, then limit discussion time at the meeting. The pre-reviewer would have to work with the Principal Investigator (PI) to develop an approvable protocol. Then I would assign more pre-reviews to Chow, not fewer. I would make sure that Chow receives a copy of every full protocol before the meeting, not just those that she pre-reviews, and ask her to resolve any issues that she has with the PI before the meeting. Another alternative would be to make greater use of the designated

reviewer procedure.

The pre-review procedure at Great Eastern that “allow[s] the Attending Veterinarian (AV) to review and comment on pain and distress issues” may not be adequate to address the 9 CFR requirement that the AV must be involved in the planning of painful procedures. A stronger prospective role for the AV might assuage some of Chow’s concerns as well.

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