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'Best Dog Friends' Looking for a Home

For nearly 8 years, Ping and Pong, two large foxhound crosses, had been used two or three times a week, almost every week of the year, for veterinary student training. There was nothing invasive, just listening to heart and lung sounds, giving ear and eye examinations, palpating various body areas as part of an applied anatomy course, and so forth. The canines seemed to relish the attention from the students, and after a period of time they had become the unofficial pets of the veterinary school. When they weren't serving as subjects for training, they lived in a large indoor-outdoor run in the nearby research animal facility. They were 'best dog friends'.

Times changed. More and more pigs were being used for research, and their housing required increasing amounts of space. Over a period of time, the institution moved Ping and Pong to progressively smaller areas; eventually, the general consensus was that they simply needed more living space, but there was none available. Because their use as teaching animals was covered by an IACUC protocol, the space issue made its way to that Committee via concerned veterinary students. In response, the IACUC asked Sam Holton, the animal facility manager, to evaluate the existing space to determine if it was in compliance with the Animal Welfare Act regulations. Holton determined that the space for two dogs was actually more than just a little bit too small. He apologized for not recognizing the problem, then added that as the dogs had aged the school had used them ever less (they were becoming a little irritable with students and were starting to develop some old-age problems). In fact, the school was now using small beagles, which the school could house comfortably in the existing space. Nevertheless, although Ping and Pong had some trouble moving around, Holton said they were released for

at least an hour, twice a day, to wander (or sleep) in an enclosed hallway, and they still very much seemed to enjoy each other's company. The IACUC asked if anyone had attempted to find an adoptive home for the two canine friends. Holton replied that they had been trying for nearly a year, but nobody, including the city's no-kill animal shelter, was willing to accept two aging dogs. The veterinary school had even offered free lifelong veterinary care for the animals, but to no avail. However, he said there were two individual large cages, across an aisle from each other, which could be made available for the dogs. Either cage was too small for two dogs, but more than large enough for one animal. When asked whether any side-by-side cages could be modified, Holton responded that this had been considered, but it could not be done.

The IACUC faced a challenge. The school was still using the dogs, though less frequently. The Committee considered talking to the USDA inspector to see if she would allow the dogs to remain in their existing space, in which they seemed comfortable but that was too small under federal regulations. They considered that risky, because the inspector might have to cover her own tracks for missing the overcrowding. Alternately, the Committee could comply with federal regulations and separate the animals for most of the day. What should this IACUC do?

Adoption Is the Best Option

John A. Salig, BS, MS

Veterinary students have been conditioning these two dogs to be handled for almost 8 years two to three times per week, and they are obviously enjoying all the atten-

tion. Now, the veterinary school plans to relegate these two 'unofficial' pets two separate cages for most of the day, allowing them 'free time' twice a day for an hour each time, essentially for the rest of their lives! What is wrong with this picture?

This becomes a quality-of-life question. So long as they are on protocol, their living conditions are going to come under USDA scrutiny. Sooner or later the USDA will step in and ask whether keeping the dogs under these conditions for the small amount of time they are used is in the best interest of the animals. If the animals are taken off study, then the USDA has essentially no say, but the animals cannot then stay in the facility, unless other accommodations are found within the facility, where they can be together.

Adoption of the two dogs together is obviously the best-case scenario, but the school has tried this, without success.

The IACUC has to give one last concerted effort to place these animals in a home where they can live out their lives comfortably. If this fails, then, unfortunately, one has to consider euthanasia. As unappealing as this sounds, the IACUC has to determine whether a bad life is more desirable than a good death.

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What Value Has Life over Quality of Life?

David B. Morton, PhD

Ping and Pong, as 'best-friend dogs' for more than 8 years, would no doubt miss each other if separated, and so there is certainly some obligation to avoid that harm.