

A balancing act

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Dr. Martin talks about the role of the laboratory animal veterinarian in balancing the integrity of research with the welfare of laboratory animals.

Describe a typical workday in your current position at Cornell University.

One of the things I most enjoy about my position is that there is no ‘typical’ day. I might be meeting with the other veterinarians and technicians on the staff to discuss recent clinical cases in mice, dogs or horses. Later in the day I could be reading IACUC protocols or meeting with investigators to discuss new studies that they are planning to start. The clinical staff routinely visits the various animal facilities, from rodent facilities to farm settings, to assess animal well-being and discuss any concerns with the facility manager. With the veterinary college at Cornell, there are also many opportunities to interact with the faculty and staff and to attend seminars of interest. I enjoy interacting with the residents in laboratory animal medicine and the veterinary students. It is exciting to see their eagerness to learn, which ultimately furthers the welfare of animals in both veterinary and biomedical research.

You spent a good part of your career working in small animal veterinary private practice. How did that experience compare to working in laboratory animal medicine?

In both private practice and laboratory animal medicine, the veterinarian is the animals’ advocate. As veterinarians, we examine the animal, make diagnoses and advise on treatment options. In both situations, the animals come ‘attached’ to people—either owners or investigators.

In private practice, the animal may be a pet, and by extension also a member of the family; conversely, they may be a source of livelihood, as in the case of livestock. The decision to treat the animal can be difficult because of emotional attachment or financial constraints, and the veterinarian does his or her best to aid in the decision-making process. In lab animal medicine, the investigators also have an attachment to the animal because of an emotional connection or because of the research progress that the animal signifies. Again, the veterinarian is there to assist in weighing options and advocating in the animals’ best interests while striving to further the progress of the study.

How did your interest in research inspire you to pursue a career in laboratory animal medicine?

I have several family members with serious medical issues, and I understand and appreciate the need for animal-based research. The field of laboratory animal medicine allows me to utilize the skills gained in private practice to support research efforts aimed at making life better for humans and animals. I fully support research, but when using animals, it must be done humanely and with proper oversight. That is a major role of the laboratory animal veterinarian, and the area where I felt I could best make a contribution to research.

You earned a Master’s in Public Health (MPH) degree from Johns Hopkins University while doing your postdoctoral fellowship. How has this degree been useful to you in your career as a lab animal veterinarian?

While at Johns Hopkins University, I did research with Dr. J. Stephen Dumler in



the field of Rickettsiology. For my MPH thesis, I studied the immune response to *Anaplasma phagocytophilum*, which is carried by the same tick as Lyme disease, in a mouse model and how it related to the human response. The MPH degree has helped me to understand the ‘herd health’ aspects of laboratory animal medicine, such as when managing colonies of mice and rats. On a personal level, because the MPH program at Johns Hopkins University is very international, I interacted with students and faculty from many different countries; it was interesting and rewarding to learn from so many fascinating cultures.

As the director of the graduate DVM residency program in Laboratory Animal Medicine at Cornell University, what do you think is the most important thing that someone interested in becoming a laboratory animal veterinarian should know?

The laboratory animal medicine veterinarian is a key person in both supporting research and advocating for animal welfare, and it can sometimes be difficult to balance both. The ultimate reward is seeing the results of well-done research coming to fruition, advancing the health and well-being of humans and animals and knowing that you can make a difference.