Unfortunate but not noncompliant

The IACUC has no grounds to censure Dr. Stark. The chair was concerned that Dr. Stark euthanized a group of **healthy, naïve**, animals to save money. If instead Dr. Stark had euthanized any other experimental group of animals, I do not think anyone would have raised an issue.

Let's examine some alternative scenarios:

What if Dr. Stark had euthanized a group of **unhealthy** animals to eliminate unnecessary pain and distress? What if the study design was a painful disease model with a group of untreated control animals (e.g. mice with arthritis not receiving any anti-inflammatory or analgesic treatment)? If he determined mid-study that this control group was not scientifically necessary, he would have been lauded by the IACUC

for terminating the group early to save on unnecessary pain and distress.

What if Dr. Stark euthanized a group of healthy **non-naïve** animals to save on per diems, labor, expensive research reagents, and possible animal stress from handling and dosing? What if he started with four dosing groups, and discovered mid-study that the exposures in one oral group were too low to be biologically relevant? Terminating that group early would have been scientifically, ethically, and fiscally responsible.

Now we come to the actual scenario. Dr. Stark discovered, based on preliminary data, that the untreated control arm was not necessary. Keeping the group and analyzing terminal tissues anyway would have used up resources (labor, reagents, facility space, per diem payments). If these had been non-naïve

or unhealthy mice, it would have been clear that the ethical, scientifically justified, and fiscally responsible decision was early euthanasia. The fact that these were naïve healthy mice does not negate that. However, if the mice were indeed completely naïve, it would have been preferable to repurpose them by transferring them to another study or for training. If the IACUC wants to encourage this behavior, they could create a program to facilitate such transfers. □

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