DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
South Texas Veterans Health Care System
San Antonio, Texas 78229-4404

Research Service Policy Memorandum 16-07

February 1, 2016

ANIMAL CARE AND USE PROGRAM

Procedures within the Veterinary Medical Unit (VMU)

1. **PURPOSE:** To provide specific procedures used within the Veterinary Medical Unit.

2. **POLICY:** Laboratory animals will be handled at all times with maximum consideration for the animal's well-being and safety for all personnel. Federal laws and regulations will be strictly observed.

3. **ACTION:**

a. **GENERAL:**

(1) No laboratory animal, animal food, animal cage equipment, or bedding material may be purchased or acquired from any source without prior approval from VMU Supervisor. All requests for animals, feed, bedding, and related equipment will be approved by the VMU Supervisor prior to ordering.

(2) Animals from sources that are not licensed or registered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture will be quarantined at the affiliate UTHSCSA Laboratory Animal Resources (LAR) and will not be brought into or housed in the VMU until UTHSCSA LAR quarantine requirements have been met.

(3) All carcasses of animals shall be disposed of by incineration. Properly covered and marked containers for the disposal of animal carcasses must be provided, and, in no instance, may animal carcasses be placed in the same container as garbage or refuse.

(4) No personnel may participate in animal research without an active VA Appointment (WOC or salaried), completion of required training and must be listed on the study protocol. The principal investigator will verify the competency of each research assistant approved to participate on the protocol. No personnel may perform procedures for which they have not been trained.

(5) Investigators must arrange any animal transportation between the VA and affiliate institution with the VMU Supervisor. No animals will be transported within VA hallways outside Research Service restricted area.

(6) Visitors shall not have access to rooms in which animals are housed or used without prior authorization from the VMU Supervisor and concurrence of the concerned research investigator. All visitors must register in the Research Office prior to entry into restricted area and be escorted by authorized personnel at all times. Children under the age of 15 are not allowed in the VMU.

(7) All animals must receive every consideration for their bodily comfort; they shall be kindly treated, properly fed, and their surroundings kept in a sanitary condition at all times. Housekeeping duties that pertain to the housing of research animals will be accomplished by VMU Animal Technicians.

b. **HOUSING:**

(1) Research animals at this hospital will be housed in the VMU area only. Space will be provided at the discretion of the VMU Supervisor regarding the specific assignment of animals to the various rooms in the VMU.

(2) Primary enclosures/cages will be appropriate for the species housed, providing adequate room for normal postural positioning and movement, and consistent with the recommendations of *The Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animal*s and animal welfare regulations.

(3) Animals will be housed in compatible groups where appropriate.

(4) **Animals will always have ready access to food and potable water:** Any deviation from the normal food and water intake must be clearly defined in the written animal protocol and understood by the VMU Staff.

(5) **Research animals will not be maintained in any research laboratory within the Research area:** Experimental procedures will be conducted in designated areas within the VMU. Any deviations must be approved by the ACOS for Research and Development, Veterinary Medical Consultant, and VMU Supervisor.

c. **BIOHAZARDS:** Any investigation involving animals experimentally infected with virulent or pathogenic organisms must be approved by the Subcommittee for Research Safety. An appropriate program of biological safety shall be adopted and followed for a given experimental design in all work with biological materials that can cause an infection in animals and man. Included in these guidelines are the following:

(1) Experimental work shall be performed in specified rooms which shall be marked by a conspicuous sign "HAZARDOUS BIOLOGICAL MATERIALS" and specifically identifying the biological agent. Doors labeled in this manner shall be kept closed at all times.

(2) After infectious agents have been introduced into experimental animals, a "BIOHAZARD" identifier will be affixed to each cage. All animals, equipment, and room shall be regarded and treated as contaminated. The name of the investigator, a description of the infectious agent, date and method of administration, and emergency telephone number shall be suitably placed on each cage card.

(3) All animals must be segregated and proper precautions will be taken to prevent the spread of the infection.

(4) The cage (with contents) used for housing animals infected with pathogenic organisms shall be sterilized on removal of the animal.

d. **RADIOACTIVE MATERIALS:** The use of radioactive materials or any device which produces ionizing radiation as a by-product is governed by Federal and State laws. The Radiation Safety Officer (RSO) must approve all work with radioactive materials and radiation producing devices. The following guidelines apply for the use of laboratory animals and radioactive materials.

(1) The work shall be performed in specified rooms which shall be marked by a warning label bearing the radioactive symbol.

(2) After a radioactive material has been introduced into an animal, its cage and equipment shall be marked by warning tape bearing the radioactivity symbol. The name of the investigator, the isotope used, the dosage of radioactive material, and the date and method of administration shall be noted on the cage card. The principal investigator will notify the VMU Supervisor and RSO immediately of the procedures.

(3) After radioactive materials have been introduced into experimental animals, the affected animals must be maintained separate from general population. The cage, bedding, waste, rack and room will be recorded and treated as radioactive.

(4) It is the investigator's responsibility to ensure radioactive waste is collected in approved containers and delivered to the RSO for disposal.

(5) At the termination of the experiment the label bearing the radioactive symbol shall not be removed from the cage until it has been surveyed by the investigator or his/her representative. If the survey shows no residual radioactive material, the label can then be removed.

(6) The introduction of radioactive materials into animals shall not be performed in the VMU animal rooms unless special permission has been received from the VMU Supervisor and RSO.

e. **DRUGS:**

(1) **Storage:** Controlled substances are kept in the VMU Omnicell in room U235. Only the VMU Supervisor and his/her designee have access. The Omnicell is monitored electronically by pharmacy and inspected monthly by Controlled Substance Inspectors. Non-controlled substances are kept in locked cabinets in room R225.

(2) Investigators and technicians must show records substantiating administration before additional drugs are issued.

(3) **Expiration:** All incoming drugs are pre-labeled with an expiration date and check by the controlled substance inspectors. The VMU staff is responsible for inspecting all drugs on a monthly basis and removing expired drugs.

4. **RESPONSIBILITY:** Investigators will be responsible for compliance with this policy. Personnel observing questionable practices are urged to discuss with the Associate Chief of Staff for Research and Development.

5. **REFERENCES:** Laboratory Animal Welfare; Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, 2011; The Animal Welfare Act of 1976 (public Law 94-279) with related rules and regulations as issued by Secretary of Agriculture, April 22, 1976.

6. **RECISSIONS:** Research Service Policy Memorandum 09-07, November 30, 2009.

7. **RECERTIFICATION**: January 2021

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DISTRIBUTION: Veterinary Medical Unit Investigators