

FASEB's The Case for Canines in Biomedical Research Webinar
April 25, 2019

Questions from the Audience

all answers are from Dr. 's Michael Fallon and Alice Huang

- 1) Q: Thank you! The patient testimonials never fail to leave a lasting impression. It is great to listen to the voices of people who have been directly impacted by canine/animal research.**

The film clips in the presentation are now available online here in the Videos section: https://www.research.va.gov/programs/animal_research/canine_research/default.cfm. Also, a short color pamphlet on the importance of VA canine research is available on the same page.

A: We encourage you to track down these kinds of powerful stories related to work done at your institution. It may not be obvious to the public how saving the life of a person with a medical problem or easing their suffering depends on the work with animals, so it's important to be clear and direct in telling the truth about the research, pointing out explicitly how the medical advances are related to it.

- 2) Q: I'm curious about your expense figures, i.e. 100 dogs per year with \$100,00 in expense = \$1,000/dog/year. Seems low to me based on my experience. How did you determine the \$100,000 per year figure?**

A: VA research is supported by funds from many sources, including not only VA funds, but also funds from NIH, DoD, research organizations (like the American Heart Association), industry sponsors, and institutional funds from affiliated universities. The 100 dogs are considered to be engaged in "VA animal research", regardless of the source of funding used. The \$100,000 figure is the amount of VA funds used for purchase and care of dogs – this is the relevant amount that is criticized as a "waste of VA funds" by animal rights activists who claim to specifically oppose the use of Federal dollars for animal research.

- 3) Q: Given how compelling your presentation was about dog research, why did the VA capitulate so easily on the cat research involving toxoplasmosis?**

A: The research on toxoplasmosis was being conducted by the USDA, not VA.

- 4) Q: Great presentation. It is a common statement during webinars such as this about "making sure we get the correct information out" to the public. What is the best way to accomplish this at the institutional level (for those in academia), local/city level or state level?**

A: The key is to make public as much information from your institution as possible, in context, and before you are asked for it. An effective approach is to put relevant information and testimonies on your website now, so it is there when questions arise. Waiting until you are asked can be interpreted as an attempt to maintain secrecy, and those who want to misrepresent the information will not likely provide the appropriate context.

Beyond the institution, there are numerous organizations dedicated to promoting transparency about research with animals, with examples, and advice on their websites. You can get started with <https://speakingofresearch.com/>, and <http://www.understandinganimalresearch.org.uk/policy/concordat-openness-animal-research/>.

- 5) **Q: How is this information that Dr. Fallon discussed, shared with the public in this same level of detail? Who receives this information? How can we get this type of information distributed to the general public in a way that they will relate to?**

A: The primary recipients of the information in Dr. Fallon’s portion of the presentation have been members of Congress, members of the media, and Veterans Service Organizations. But we are posting increasing amounts of information on our website about animal research (https://www.research.va.gov/programs/animal_research/default.cfm) for easy public access, particularly about canine research (https://www.research.va.gov/programs/animal_research/canine_research/default.cfm). On the canine overview web page is a slide set with a more detailed presentation than what Dr. Fallon provided during this webinar, and links to the video clips shown (“Videos” section).

We have been learning a lot about getting information posted online and making it accessible and effective. Social media sites will also important for distributing this information, but we are not yet active there. One lesson worth keeping in mind is “Don’t wait” until you can put together a complete package – just get started, then add to it and revise it as you go.

- 6) **Q: Just a comment that it is also important to emphasize when responding to concerns is that these are purpose bred animals not pets.**

A: Agreed. The dogs in VA research are all purpose-bred by vendors specifically for research (Class A USDA breeders), as required by PHS and VA policy. None come from private homes and none have been pets. It is also important to our agency that we have a policy that healthy dogs suitable for adoption after research all go to private homes. VA partners with Homes for Animal Heroes (<http://animalheroes.naiainline.org>) to ensure that they are placed with loving families that can care for them properly.

- 7) **Q: Does the VA do any public outreach or education currently?**

A: VA has an annual Research Day event (in May) (https://www.research.va.gov/researchweek/field_events.cfm), for which the local VA stations are encouraged to provide the information to the public and raise awareness about the value of VA research, including VA research with animals. We hope to develop more materials going forward that we can provide to the local stations to enhance their presentations. Right now our focus is on getting key documents onto our website (https://www.research.va.gov/programs/animal_research/default.cfm), where they are of course available for anyone to use. The response to item 5 describes our outreach to key external stakeholders in VA research.