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ISU Euthanasia School

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Striving to assure humane euthanasia of animals in Iowa, ISU’s College of Veterinary Medicine is expanding its educational program. Its first three-day Euthanasia Technician School will be offered to animal shelter personnel and animal health technicians May 29-31. Interested parties should contact Dr. Grier at the Veterinary Teaching Hospital, 515-294-4900.

The curriculum will include lectures, hands-on work in laboratory sessions, and instruction in techniques for humane handling and euthanasia of wildlife as well as domestic animals. “This is just another step in the College’s appreciation and awareness of animal life dignity,” said Dr. P. T. Pearson, Dean of the College of Veterinary Medicine.

The College laid the groundwork for the Euthanasia Technician School last August when it presented a two-day Euthanasia Seminar to 75 veterinarians and shelter personnel from Iowa and surrounding states. The speakers (a veterinary anesthesiologist, euthanasia product manufacturer, state regulatory veterinarian, regulatory pharmacist, veterinary clinician, animal control officer, and humane society representative) discussed how public and private shelters can achieve the most humane euthanasia methods available.

Seminar demonstrations included techniques for intravenous injections and use of the newer Schedule III euthanasia agents. Bill Hurt Smith, Director of the Animal control Academy of the Humane Society of the United States, led a day-long stress management training session to help personnel deal with the emotional strain of euthanizing the multitude of unwanted animals.

Leading ISU’s euthanasia programs have been Lois Kopecky, Animal Control Officer for Iowa City, Iowa, and Dr. Ronald L. Grier, professor of Veterinary Clinical Sciences at ISU.

A long time advocate of humane treatment of animals, Kopecky has actively worked to increase awareness of the animal population problem. Even before the August Euthanasia Seminar, she traveled throughout Iowa, talking with ISU veterinary students and faculty, animal interest groups, and veterinary medical associations and showing the award-winning film Kiss the Animals Good-bye. She likes to show this film because it depicts the daily operation of a euthanasia program in an animal shelter of a major city in a very realistic manner.

In discussing the Euthanasia Training School, Kopecky said, “While an increasing number of states have outlawed decompression chambers and allowed direct access of barbiturates to animal shelter personnel, few states have provided a comprehensive training program. It seemed a logical choice that the ISU College of Veterinary Medicine with its trained faculty, facilities, and sensitivity to prevention of animal suffering should administer such a program.”

Grier, chairman of the Animal Welfare and Humane Society Liaison of the Iowa Veterinary Medical Association, added, “It seems ironic that we veterinarians are looked to as the experts in determining humane euthanasia and yet, until recently, we have given only minor attention to euthanasia in our veterinary curriculum. For the most part, we veterinarians have little understanding of, or interest in, euthanasia of the ownerless animals that, in reality, represent the majority of the animals that are killed in the United States.”

Grier said that the Euthanasia Technician
School is just one of several steps ISU is taking to improve the humane treatment of animals. "The Euthanasia School is an extension of previous ISU academic changes reflecting more responsible animal stewardship," Grier explained. "Surgery training is now more constructive because our students spay and castrate animals which are to be adopted later through animal shelters and humane societies. Multiple-survival major surgeries are no longer performed on laboratory dogs. Efforts are being made to change a veterinary ethics course from an elective to a required course."

Before an animal is used in the College, its use must be clearly justified. "Because of our concern for their humane care, we look for alternatives to the use of live animals in teaching and research. For example, ISU is pursuing the possible use of "Bridget," a dog mannequin, for CPR instruction to senior students enrolled in the critical care unit hospital rotation," Grier explained.

"ISU is responding to a social problem that never should have happened. It is time that we veterinarians also respond," Grier advocated. "We can help by stressing responsible pet ownership in our daily practice, emphasizing neutering, promoting pet identification methods, supporting legislative measures that emphasize pet owner responsibilities, and supporting—even spearheading—measures which reaffirm the intrinsic value of animals," he said.

He summarized, "When veterinarians actively work towards population control and humane euthanasia of animals, not only will animals benefit, but an increased public awareness and sensitivity to the value of animal life will ultimately enhance the veterinary profession."

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