
LASA Guidance on the Rehoming of Laboratory Dogs

A report based on a LASA working party and
LASA meeting on rehoming laboratory animals



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Preface

In June 2000, LASA hosted a meeting to discuss the question "*What do we do with post-experimental or surplus animals - re-use, re-home, release, euthanase?*" At this meeting representatives of welfare and scientific organisations described their experiences of rehoming laboratory animals and in particular laboratory beagles. The overwhelming view was that this could be successful, and that such animals could very effectively integrate into a new home outside the laboratory. However, despite the successes, experience had shown it was not always an easy task, and certainly not one to be undertaken lightly. It was clear that there was a need for guidelines to assist the process and ensure that rehoming is carried out efficiently and with least disturbance to the animal. LASA therefore set up a working party to further develop views expressed at the meeting, and specifically to identify critical factors that need to be taken into account in the rehoming of laboratory dogs. This report combines into one document the guidelines on rehoming produced by the working party and relevant background information from the original meeting (see Appendix A). Subsequently, the BVA,AWF/FRAME/RSPCA/UFAW Joint Working Group on Refinement published a detailed report on the husbandry and care of laboratory dogs which contains additional relevant information which can be used as an adjunct to the LASA documents (see references).

Although these guidelines refer specifically to dogs the same principles could be applied to rehoming any species used in the laboratory.

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LASA Meeting June, 2000: What do we do with Post-Experimental or Surplus Animals? Re-use, Re-home, Release, Euthanase?

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Guidance on the rehoming of laboratory dogs

1. Introduction

Some establishments have successfully rehomed laboratory dogs over many years – an exercise that has proved beneficial to the individual animal, the new owner and the staff at the rehoming establishment itself. If this practice is to be encouraged and become more widespread, it must be on the basis that informed and expert opinion considers the process to be in the interest of the animals in question. Sentimentality should never be the driving force in any exercise to re-home animals. The procedures adopted must be designed to ensure the well being of the animals and under no circumstances should their welfare be compromised. These guidance notes have been produced to help develop such procedures and thus facilitate the rehoming process.

The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act, 1986 (ASPA) (Section 10, subsection 3D)¹ permits the release from its controls of animals which have undergone experimental procedures, subject to approval by the Secretary of State and confirmation of their physical fitness by a veterinary surgeon or other suitably qualified person. The veterinary surgeon shall determine whether or not a dog is likely to suffer long-term consequences from any experimental investigation, but other matters need also to be taken into account. It is necessary to evaluate the merit of releasing an animal from the Act and careful consideration of the likely costs and benefits to the animal in question is an essential part of this process.

The 'benefit' is the expectation of future wellbeing and contentment for the animal and this depends primarily on the quality of life the animal will experience in his or her new home. The 'costs' mainly stem from the stress associated with the change in environment and the animal's ability to cope with and adapt to this. The ease with which the transition is accomplished depends largely upon the adaptability and life experience of the animal, the nature of the new environment and the care taken to provide a smooth transition. The principal factors that need to be considered in a rehoming programme are set out below.

2. Factors to consider

An establishment proposing to rehome animals should develop a clearly defined procedure, which allows comprehensive assessment of all the costs and benefits on an animal-by-animal basis. This is best done within the framework of a rehoming programme, which encompasses the following legal and practical considerations:

- authority for release of animals from the ASPA
- selection of suitable animals
- preparation of animals for their new lives
- assessment of the suitability of new homes and owners
- advice to prospective owners
- working through a third party animal welfare organisation
- follow up after re-homing

The programme should be developed in close consultation with the Named Veterinary Surgeon (NVS) and Named Animal Care and Welfare Officer (NACWO), and may be overseen by the local ethical review process (ERP). Note that the Laboratory Animals Veterinary Association (LAVA) has produced Guidance on the role of the NVS in determining the fate of an animal² and in certifying that removal from the designated establishment will not compromise the animal's welfare. The Guidance is intended to clarify the issues involved and to act as a basis for discussion and evaluation of what is acceptable, reasonable and practical.

2.1 Authorisation for release of animals

Authorisation for discharge of an animal from the controls of ASPA must be given by the Secretary of State in the project licence. It is important, therefore, to decide in advance whether rehoming of animals is likely to be a possibility and if so to ensure that provision for this is made in Section 19b(vii) of the Project Licence at the time it is prepared.

2.2 Selection of suitable animals

Animals intended for rehoming must be carefully assessed, and only those that are likely to adapt and thrive in a new home should be considered. They should be in good health; the most suitable animals are also confident and adaptable. In this context it is important to be aware that beagles are relatively tolerant of changes in their surroundings and have well-developed passive coping strategies, which means that overt demonstrations of stress are less frequent in these animals than in some other strains of dog. Nervous animals adapt less readily to new environments and in consequence may suffer more stress during the process. They will therefore require more time and effort to re-home successfully.

The age of the animal is a consideration though not necessarily a determining factor. Younger dogs are likely to adapt to a new home more readily, though older dogs can be rehomed successfully as well (see Appendix A.5.3).

2.3 Preparing animals for their new lives

Research establishments can take many measures to prepare their dogs for re-homing. The principal ones are:

- providing appropriate veterinary care and advice
- exposure to a variety of visual, tactile and aural experiences
- socialisation with other dogs
- socialisation with people, and
- training animals

Stringent oversight of the health of laboratory animals is already a pre-requisite for their care and use, but additional specific veterinary assessment, and confirmation of vaccination and certification are essential prior to release. Animals should also be wormed and neutered. Health screening reports should be made available and advice given on any potential zoonoses. For example, *Campylobacter* is endemic in most dog populations; it is usually asymptomatic, but it can transmit to humans. There

needs to be an agreed policy for handling such issues, including any treatments that may need to be given prior to release of the animals.

Helping the animals to become more adaptable is good practice and helps prepare them for other roles, including those outside the laboratory. Specific preparation of individual dogs can be carried out once they have been identified as potential rehoming candidates. However, where rehoming is considered a possible outcome, it is also advisable to incorporate exposure to as many ‘outside world’ experiences as possible as part of the normal habituation process for all beagles in the laboratory. Ideally, all laboratory dogs will have experience of people of either sex and of varying appearance. Men with beards, people wearing glasses, people wearing a variety of clothing and people carrying large objects can all be useful additions to the experience list for laboratory dogs. Animals may also have difficulty in adapting to children and cats; animal welfare organisations report that this is the most common reason for failure of rehoming. In the laboratory situation it is difficult to assess whether or not such contact will be a problem for individual animals, since they will not have had such exposure previously. Experience of those who have been involved in rehoming suggests that this is unlikely to be a significant problem, although it is important to keep this factor under review as experience grows.

Tactile experience is also important and different surfaces such as grass and carpet can usefully be provided. In the outside world, dogs will hear many unfamiliar sounds such as washing machines and traffic. Preparation for this aspect can readily be achieved by playing specially recorded tapes or CDs from an early age in the breeding kennels. Not only will this aid adaptation to new home environments, but it will also increase the adaptability of dogs while in the laboratory situation.

Socialisation programmes with staff and other dogs are already used in the research environment as a refinement to reduce stress and improve the welfare of laboratory dogs. They also help prepare the animal by training and habituation to the laboratory environment and routine husbandry practices. It is possible to incorporate minor adjustments to the programme to gear this specifically to rehoming, by simulating situations that mimic the external world. For example, lead training is beneficial, since this will be essential in the outside world and can also be useful in the laboratory context.



Programmes of socialisation, habituation and training not only make animals more suitable for rehoming, they also lower stress responses in animals faced with novel situations such as visitors to the establishment and experimental procedures. The socialisation programme should be geared to the primary, experimental use of the animals, but if conducted correctly it increases the ability of dogs to adapt to other novel experiences they will encounter in their new homes. Further guidance on this and other relevant aspects of dog husbandry and care is available in a detailed report by the

Socialisation in a complex environment at a UK breeding establishment

BVA,AWF/FRAME/RSPCA/UFAW Joint Working Group on Refinement published in *Laboratory Animals* 2004³.

Once rehoming candidates are clearly identified, preparing the animals for their new role should be progressed further. For example house training can be started in the laboratory by the provision of litter trays. Any time invested at this stage will ease the process later.

2.4 Assessing the suitability of new homes and owners

The suitability of the new home and the new owner is vital to the success of any rehoming project. However, too great a rigor in this respect will severely limit the number of suitable homes that can be found. It is therefore important to recognise that the more constraints and caveats used to define the suitability of homes and prospective owners, and for that matter the suitability of the animals themselves, the more difficult it will be to identify candidates. Nevertheless, in any rehoming situation, safeguarding the welfare of the animal must always remain an absolute priority and it is essential to apply criteria that ensure this can be done.

It is vital that the owners selected are committed to re-homing, receptive to advice, and willing to deal with problems that are likely to occur. They must also understand the temperament of beagles and actually want a dog of this breed. Hounds were originally bred for hunting and tend to be relatively independent animals which enjoy spending time in activities associated with exploring and seeking out prey. Most pet owners desire a dog that is relatively dependent on them and so the beagle is often not the most appropriate choice. This could limit uptake of beagles as companion animals, although in practice it has not been found to be a problem

Past experience of rehoming has shown that dogs generally settle better into an environment where other dogs are present. Dogs are pack animals and, as such, have been bred in the context of a pack structure for many years. In the laboratory, Home Office requirements and common practice result in animals rarely being isolated, except for very specific and justified purposes. When rehoming laboratory beagles therefore, the presence of a canine companion is extremely desirable; one solution is to ensure dogs are re-homed in pairs. The incidence of behavioural problems relating to separation should be significantly reduced by adhering to a two dog rule. Although more difficult, single animals can be rehomed effectively, but it is important that the animal is not left alone for long periods in the new home without prior training to accept that situation. Appropriate behavioural therapy should be instituted by the owner if separation related behaviour problems become apparent (See Appendixes A.4.1 - A.4.3)

Other factors may influence the decision and animal welfare charities, including the RSPCA, have produced guidelines⁴ which provide useful advice in this respect. For example it is usually preferable to re-home dogs into a relatively quiet environment, since this tends to have a calming influence on their behaviour. Beagles also have a tendency to roam and are renowned for being very effective at escaping, so gardens should be made escape-proof before the beagle arrives.

2.5 Advice to prospective owners

New owners must have realistic expectations if they are to make an informed decision as to whether or not to re-home an animal, and to effectively manage any subsequent problems. It is therefore essential that they are properly briefed with regard to house training, the potential for destructive behaviour, and general animal health issues including obesity. They also need to know that beagles have a tendency to run off if not kept on the lead, and can subsequently be difficult to retrieve.

New owners need to appreciate the significance and extent of the alteration in environment from the beagle's perspective and the possibility that novel experiences could provoke a wide variety of abnormal behaviours including nervousness, aggression, fear and dependency problems. They must also understand that laboratory beagles are generally accustomed to the company of other beagles. Because different breeds of dog display breed-specific patterns of behaviour, the rehomed beagle must learn to interpret the social signals used by different breeds, both within and outside the home. In order to help owners with these issues, they should be told how to contact a suitably qualified dog behaviourist and encouraged to use such services if any problems arise. This is especially important during the early weeks after arrival of the dog.

Owners should also be advised about how to deal with public relations aspects of owning an ex-laboratory beagle, especially in situations where their dog is showing signs of nervousness. Beagles are not common pets and people may realise that the animals have come from a research establishment. New owners therefore need to have thought through their answers to questions about where the animal has come from, and what procedures it may have been subjected to, as well as clarifying their own views on the scientific use of animals in general.

2.6 Rehoming through a third party

There are significant advantages for the animals if rehoming is addressed in partnership with a national animal welfare organisation such as the RSPCA. Dogs rehomed via this route will be in experienced and expert hands (see Appendix A.4.4). Rehoming organisations normally worm, neuter and microchip all animals and it is reasonable for them to expect larger research establishments to use their resources to carry out these procedures. Large third-party organisations can generally accommodate the relatively small numbers of dogs supplied for rehoming by the research community, without this impacting on their ability to re-home dogs from other sources and for the costs incurred may not be a major issue. Smaller organisations may have limited resources. In either case, research establishments releasing animals should consider underwriting the cost of rehoming programmes.

2.7 Follow up after rehoming

Laboratory beagles may take some time to adjust to their new environment. In view of this, it is important to follow up animals once they have been placed in the new home, to ensure that their welfare is not compromised. New owners need to be assured that advice is always available by phone, either from a Named Person at the establishment, by another nominated person such as a local veterinary practitioner, or

where a rehoming organisations is involved, by one of their staff. Specialist behaviourist or veterinary advice should be sought if appropriate. Follow-up visits allow assessment of the dog's behaviour in it's home, and provide an opportunity to discuss any concerns and problems the owner may have. Major animal welfare societies usually carry out home visits. If procedures have been successfully validated and the process for rehoming is well established, trained volunteers can usually monitor the situation adequately during a single follow up visit after two months, and this has become the norm for major animal welfare organisations.

Each dog responds differently to the rehoming process and animals that fail to settle down into life in their new home should be returned and a second attempt at rehoming made. Animals which cannot be re-homed after two or at most three attempts should be euthanased.

3. The way forward

Laboratory beagles have been successfully rehomed by a number of organisations for many years. However, despite documented successes, contributors to this report believe that an objective assessment of the process is still needed. If uptake of the opportunity offered by rehoming is to be extended, it must be on the basis that it is unequivocally beneficial to the animals. Involvement of appropriately skilled people would have the benefit of establishing a more objective and rational evaluation of the success of re-homing. It would also enable assessment of the impact on the animals. Importantly, it would aid refinements to the process so as to maximise animal welfare.

Thirty animals would probably provide a cohort of sufficient size to effectively validate the rehoming process. Such a study would necessitate a clear protocol and would involve regular follow-up visits by a person trained in animal behaviour during the first twelve months. We believe that follow-up visits should be carried out at 1-2 months, 6 months, and 12 months. Assessments should be based on a behavioural scoring system, which should also be applied before dogs leave the laboratory. Assessments should ideally take place just prior to the dog being issued by the rehoming society and at each follow up visit by the behaviourist. Comparisons can then be made which will establish how well the dog is adjusting to the changes in its environment. This would provide an excellent opportunity to establish a rehoming process in a responsible and scientifically valid manner, which will be wholly consistent with the legal obligations, the wishes of society and the welfare of the animals.



Appendix A

Supporting information and case histories from the LASA meeting: What do we do with post-experimental or surplus animals – Re-use, Re-home, Release, Euthanase?

A.1 Discharge of animals from the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 – the legal position

Authorisation for discharge of any animal from the controls of ASPA must be given by the Secretary of State in the project licence, i.e. the eventual fate of the animals concerned must be written in to section 19b of the licence application. This is not a decision for the NVS or any other individual at the establishment.

Discharge of an animal from the ASPA is only possible if the animal is not suffering or likely in the future to suffer any adverse effects from the regulated procedures they undergo. There is no question of animals being discharged if they are in any way ill, or likely to be ill, as the result of any procedure done on them.

Where authorised on the project licence, the decision to keep an animal alive at the end of a regulated procedure should be initiated by the project (and where appropriate, personal licence holder) although the local ERP may establish an overall rehoming policy for the establishment. In practice, the NVS (or another suitably qualified person, see ASPA section 10.3D(a))¹ will discuss with the Project Licence Holder whether the terms of discharge have been met. If the animal is to leave the designated establishment the NVS must certify that the animal will not suffer if it is removed from the designated establishment. The NVS cannot, and does not, certify that the animals will not come to any harm in their future life, but that they will not do so as a result of the experimental procedures to which they may have been subjected.

Stock animals which have not undergone regulated procedures are the responsibility of the establishment and in practice the NACWO and/or NVS decides whether they are to be reallocated to another study, killed or can be rehomed.

A.2 Numbers of experimental animals potentially available to discharge

It is difficult to estimate the number of experimental animals that might be available for discharge for rehoming, but it is likely to be a small proportion of the total number recorded in the Home Office Annual Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals⁵. This is because, for many animals, the last procedure is carried out under general anaesthesia from which the animal is not allowed to recover. Alternatively, in order to gain maximum value from the experiment, many animals are killed at the end of the procedure to allow the collection of tissues for further scientific examination.

In breeding establishments, surplus dogs are either reserved for use as future breeding stock, or are used in terminal procedures for collection and preparation of biological products for subsequent use in scientific research, or for diagnostic purposes. The principal products are serum, plasma and samples from major organs such as the liver, which are subsequently used for in vitro studies and tissue culture. A small number of dogs is euthanased on humane grounds.

In view of the foregoing, most ex-breeding, surplus stock and post-experimental animals are at present, euthanased. Alternative outcomes for animals which have been subject to experimental procedures are set out in the project licence application form, section 19b(vii) and are shown in Figure 1.

Where authority is granted for animals to be discharged from the ASPA, a range of species may be involved. The majority will be rodents but there are likely to be limited numbers of all the species listed in the Home Office Statistics, including birds, amphibians, cows, sheep, pigs, horses, dogs, cats and primates. Technically, the range of discharge options shown in Figure 1 is available for all of these animals. However, in practice, their likely fate is influenced by the species concerned and numbers involved. Significant numbers of companion animals such as dogs, cats and horses, for example, are more likely to be considered for rehoming than rodents. For farm animal species, alternatives to immediate euthanasia are more likely to be discharge to a farm or slaughterhouse.

Genetically modified animals and harmful mutants comprise an additional category. These are bred under a project licence and it is extremely unlikely that discharge from the ASPA would be permitted, whether or not they have been subjected to a specific scientific procedures.

Figure 1 - Project Licence Application Section 19b(vii)

(vii) Fate of the animals

Indicate the proposed fate of the animals after conduct of procedures described in (v) above by entering a cross in the appropriate box(es) below and giving further details as required:

Euthanasia:

- Killing by a Schedule 1 method at a designated establishment.
- Killing by a non-Schedule 1 method at a designated establishment - give details in section (v) of this protocol sheet.
- Killing for scientific purposes at a place other than a designated establishment - give details in section (v) of this protocol sheet and ensure that the place is identified in section 13.

Continued use:

- 'Continued' use in another protocol under this or another project licence - give details in section (v) of this protocol sheet and ensure that appropriate cross-reference is given in section (iv) of the protocol sheet under which the continued use occurs.

Kept alive at the end of the series of procedures: (See Note 1 below)

- Kept alive at the designated establishment. Note that any subsequent re-use is subject to Section 14 of the Act and must be authorised in section (iv) of the relevant protocol sheet (either on this licence or another). Any re-use in this protocol should also be detailed in section (v) above.
- Discharge from the controls of the Act – e.g. to be a companion animal, to a farm, to a market, or
To be humanely killed at a place other than a designated establishment. (*See Note 2 below*)
- Discharge from the controls of the Act at a place other than a designated establishment, including
Setting free to the wild at the end of the protocol. (*See Note 2 below*)

Notes

- 1 *Where it is not intended to kill an animal at the end of the series of procedures a veterinary surgeon (or other suitably qualified person acceptable to the Secretary of State) must determine whether that animal can remain alive.*
- 2 *For discharge in these circumstances a veterinary surgeon (or other suitably qualified person acceptable to the Secretary of State) must certify that the animal will not suffer as a consequence of the regulated procedures applied.*

A.3 The perspective of the Named Veterinary Surgeon

The Laboratory Animals Veterinary Association (LAVA) has produced Guidance for the role of the NVS² in determining whether an animal should be killed or kept alive, and in certifying that removal from the designated establishment will not compromise the animal's welfare. The Guidance is intended to clarify the issues involved and to act as a basis for discussion and evaluation of what is acceptable, reasonable and practical. It examines each category of discharge from the ASPA and sets out basic

principles to help determine, in each case, whether this is an appropriate thing to do. Others may also be involved in making these decisions, particularly the Named Animal Care and Welfare Officer (NACWO) and scientists may express opinions on the fate of animals held under their licence. The issues should also be discussed by the establishment's Ethical Review Process (ERP). It may be helpful for the ERP to formulate a 'site policy', which can then be used as a basis for preparing project licence applications. Whatever policy is adopted, it is necessary for the NVS to ensure that there are proper records and tracking systems within the establishment to allow continuous monitoring of the system.

A.3.1 Practical Principles

There are some general practical considerations that apply whatever discharge option is to be followed. Most importantly, prior to discharge, there should be a review of the procedures to which the animal has been subjected and of its clinical records. For release to be appropriate, these together with a thorough clinical examination should show there to be:

- no adverse effects of the procedure;
- no lifestyle effects of laboratory housing;
- no genetic or physical defects;
- no implants other than microchips;

There are also specific considerations which apply to each individual category and these are summarised below.

Re-use

The criteria for determining whether or not an animal can be re-used in a scientific procedure are set out in section 14 of the ASPA and in paragraphs 5.60 to 5.66 of the HO Guidance Notes on the ASPA. Assuming these are met, then if an animal is not killed at the end of a procedure, it may be returned to stock either:

- (i) not for re-use, but pending a decision as to its ultimate fate; or
- (ii) possibly for re-use.

The NVS determines the suitability of the animal for return/re-use. In so doing, it is important that all the regulated procedures the animal has undergone, or is likely to undergo are reviewed and the likelihood of further suffering assessed. It is also important to evaluate the welfare and behavioural-consequences of an extended housing period if the animal remains in stock indefinitely or until it is re-used.

If an animal is to be re-used, the authority on both the initial *and* the subsequent project licence must be confirmed. The potential for eventual discharge as a companion or farm animal after such re-use must also be considered.

Wildlife

In the case of wildlife which has been subjected to regulated procedures, there are two different opportunities for discharge:

- (i) **release** during the course of the procedure or series of procedures;
- (ii) **return** to the wild at the end of the procedure.

In both cases the criteria for determining the animals' 'fitness for release' must be specified in the project licence. In both cases it is necessary that:

- maximum care is taken to safeguard the animal's well-being;
- the procedure (such as trapping; marking, fitting of tracking devices or collection of a blood sample) does not biologically disadvantage the animal;
- the animal's state of health allows it to be set free (for example, foxes should not be suffering from sarcoptic mange);
- there is no consequential danger to public health, the ecosystem, or the environment;
- the animal's ability to cope and its chances of survival are assessed with regard to impact on its territory, food, competition, prey/predators, shelter etc.

In addition, when an animal is released to the wild at the end of procedures, it is important to consider:

- its origin, whether captured or raised and/or born in captivity;
- whether it has become adapted to captivity and maybe, therefore, at a biological disadvantage.

Other issues, which arise when working with wildlife, relate to the research programme as a whole (e.g. recognition of adverse effects in wild species, the ethics of using wild animals) but these are beyond the scope of the present discussion.

Discharge as a companion animal

This is what is normally thought of as 'rehomeing'. The concerns regarding the health and welfare of the animals outlined above apply, but there are additional considerations, with which input of the ERP may be particularly useful in defining an establishment's policy. These include ethical, political, and public relations considerations. Furthermore, the overall process of rehomeing must be developed and properly documented. This should take into account the new owner, the local veterinary practitioner and, of course, the animal.

The animal must be clearly identified for documentation and monitoring purposes (for other matters relating to the animal see section A.4). As far as the prospective owner is concerned it is important to:

- record their name and address;
- ensure they are informed about, and understand that the animal has been subject to the ASPA;
- discuss any issues, particularly acclimatisation of the animal to a home environment;
- ensure the owner is experienced and competent to look after the animal – it may be possible/advisable to visit the new home;
- provide background information for the local practitioner should subsequent treatments be required.

The owner should be asked to sign a declaration agreeing: to inform the establishment in the event of the death of the animal; that there will be no onward rehoming and; that the animal will be returned to the rehoming organisation or establishment of origin if unsuitable. However, it must be recognised that even signed undertakings may be broken!

Discharge to a farm, market, or for humane slaughter

Animals in this category might either be killed for human consumption, or retained as a 'pet', in which case the same principles apply as for companion animals. Where farm animals are concerned it is important to determine whether they are likely to end up in the human food chain and if so to observe rules regarding humans safety, including maximum residue levels.

Export of experimental animals

Animals may be 'discharged' by removing them from jurisdiction of the ASPA. This situation is most likely to arise with respect to harmful mutant, genetically manipulated and surgically or immunologically prepared animals. Authority to discharge for export may be written into the project licence or it may be given later in a 'movement form'. In either case the project licence holder is required to justify the export to the Home Office. Licence controls remain in force until the animals leave the UK. In this instance, the NVS does not certify discharge of animals but 'advises' the project licence holder that the transfer carries no significant welfare implications for the animals concerned.

As a matter of principle, Designated Establishment should ensure that animals are only exported to bona fide research teams. Before such release, it is important to ascertain the requirements of relevant licensing authorities including in the exporting/importing countries. It is also important to make prior contact with persons performing the responsibilities of the NVS and NACWO at the receiving establishment and to exchange details of husbandry, housing, health status and any special requirements (Similar arrangements should be made when animals are to be imported).

A.4 Rehoming as an alternative to euthanasia – issues to consider

In theory the concept of rehoming could be applied to any of the species of animal used under ASPA but in most cases this has been the exception rather than the rule. There are records of dogs, cats, horses, cattle, sheep, goats, ducks, chickens, geese, rats, guinea pigs, and rabbits which have been successfully transferred to new homes. The question addressed by the LASA 2000 meeting was whether rehoming could become a more common option.

Dogs can be considered for release from the ASPA and the establishment to a new life as a companion animal where (i) there is no requirement to kill the animal at the end of a procedure or series of procedures, or (ii) where there is a surplus that cannot be redirected for use under ASPA, or (iii) when breeding animals reach the end of their reproductive life. It is difficult to estimate how many dogs might fall into one of these categories in any one year, but there are always likely to be some dogs which could be discharged from the ASPA to a home.

Although the meeting focused on rehoming dogs, the principles discussed are applicable to most species. There are many issues to address. The point of view of the animal, the establishment, the new owner, and any intermediary body involved in the rehoming process must all be carefully considered.

A.4.1 Rehoming from the animals' perspective

On initial consideration, rehoming seems an ideal option for animals, but is it really as good as it appears? What are the issues for the animals? For example rehoming laboratory dogs involves changes of canine company, human contacts and physical environment, all of which may be stressful and have behavioural consequences for the animals. Each of these must be addressed if rehoming is to be a positive experience. The 'normal' physical environment for a laboratory dog is constant, relatively sterile, and often exclusively indoor. It offers constant canine company, but minimal human interaction. In contrast, a domestic environment is likely to be complex and varied, with outdoor and indoor elements, a variety of experiences, varied human interaction and, in some cases, very limited canine interaction. The question is can a dog learn to cope with this new state of 'normal'? Potential adverse psychological effects are not trivial and this should be part of an ethical and behavioural assessment in each case.

Changes in canine company

Laboratory beagles are accustomed to living with other beagles. They are usually kept in pairs or in groups, but even where pair housing is the norm, animals are increasingly allowed to socialise in larger groups for extended periods. Canine company may not be available in a new home outside of the laboratory, or the dog may be expected to integrate into an unfamiliar canine group. Behavioural consequences of this may include separation related behaviours and dog-to-dog communication problems either at home or on walks.

Changes in human contacts

In general, laboratory dogs have relatively brief human contact with a limited number of staff who have been responsible for caring for and interacting with them and who often wear distinctive clothing. Changing this situation can have far-reaching behavioural consequences: fear of people leading to compromised welfare and possibly fear-related aggression; and a tendency to become over-attached to one person in the new home with consequent separation related behaviours.

Changes in environment

Laboratory dogs spend their lives in a very constant and predictable environment, which may have lacked complexity. The domestic environment on the other hand will be complex and variable. There will be exposure to indoor and outdoor environments and to a variety of environmental stimuli. The possible behavioural consequences of alterations to the environment are: a wide range of situational anxieties, specific fears and possible phobias relating to novel stimuli, and problems in house training.

A.4.2 The need for a preparation stage for dogs and owners

Socialisation and habituation are important in preparing puppies for life. The sensitive period for socialisation and habituation lies between 4 and 14 weeks of age and during this time the puppy forms a frame of reference which will normally last for life. Changes to this frame of reference can have psychological/behavioural consequences, which may adversely affect the success of rehoming (laboratory dogs are not unique in this respect). However, with care it is possible to change these preferences and remedial socialisation and habituation can be successful. Thus, it is very important to include a preparatory phase in any rehoming scheme – and not only for the dogs but also for their new owners.

The dogs

In any rehoming scheme it is important to assess the dogs to determine how easily or well they will fit into their new environment. This may involve assessing their reaction to strangers, novel environments, novel objects (both those present and those introduced suddenly) and to dogs outside their normal social group. In all such situations a fear response is normal. The most useful prognostic indicator is the time it takes for the animal to settle down after it has been presented with the novel stimulus, be that a person, an object or a situation.

Wherever possible, dogs should be introduced to a wider variety of humans in more diverse clothing than that normally encountered in the laboratory. They should be given increased exposure to novel environments (including outdoors) and to novel stimuli, which they are likely to encounter in the new environment. Some of these paradigms are reproducible even in a laboratory environment, for example, office areas permit exposure to telephones, computer consoles, fans and unfamiliar people. The dog should also be introduced to short periods of solitude.

The owners

Potential owners need to be aware of the dog's history and be prepared to cope with the reactions of friends and colleagues to this – rehoming a laboratory dog needs to be a 'normal thing to do'. The new owner must understand that fear reactions usually result from lack of experience of the world rather than by negative experiences. They need to be patient in dealing with the dog, and resist the temptation to reassure or overindulge their new companion – dogs do not reassure each other! They should be prepared to co-operate with behavioural therapy in the new home.

Some brief suggestions on how owners can begin to address the kind of behavioural problems identified in Appendix A.4.1 are given below.

Separation problems: The dog needs to be taught that solitude is normal and their dependency on human support decreased. It is helpful to give discriminative stimuli, which enable the dog to predict solitude. If necessary, appropriate drug support can be used in the short term.

Dog-to-dog communication problems: The dog should be introduced to unfamiliar dogs under controlled conditions and appropriate responses rewarded. Their past experience is likely to be limited to their own breed, so where possible different

breeds should be incorporated into their range of contacts. Interaction should never be forced and positive associations always used.

Problems interacting with people: There will be a need to increase trust of one person in a variety of clothing to decrease dependence on visual security signals. The number and type of people who are encountered can be gradually increased and people introduced in a variety of contexts. Never force contact – teach the dog that human interaction is unconditionally rewarding. Above all, it is important to be patient.

Fears and phobias relating to the environment: Desensitisation and counter conditioning techniques can be used to increase relaxation and pleasure in the presence of previously unencountered stimuli. Reassurance and unintentional reward of fear responses should be avoided. Exposure to new situations and stimuli should be controlled. Appropriate drug support can be provided in the short term where necessary.

Problems of house training: Classical conditioning should be used to form associations between suitable substrates and elimination. The dog should always be set up to succeed and mistakes should never be punished.

A.4.3 Key issues for an animal welfare organisation

Rehoming of significant numbers of laboratory dogs is unlikely to be possible without the participation of animal welfare organisations that already rehome animals. There is a precedent for this in the German programme reported in Appendix A.5. In the UK the largest animal welfare organisation is the RSPCA. The Society promotes the rehoming of laboratory animals and considers this to be a compassionate and constructive alternative to routinely euthanasing them. Rehoming is specifically mentioned in the Society's policy booklet⁶ and the issue has been discussed with interested parties in science and industry over several years. For the Society, as for industry and academia, there are many factors that have to be considered before embarking on any formal rehoming programme. These include practical and public relations issues as well as the welfare concerns discussed elsewhere in this report.

Practical issues

For rehoming to be a viable option then there needs to be homes available that the animals can go to. Given the number of animals that the RSPCA currently deals with, it could not take on a long term rehoming programme without considering the capacity in its existing animal homes and the consequent knock-on effect on dogs from other sources. The RSPCA currently has 52 animal homes; 15 are operated directly from the Society's headquarters and 37 are operated by its branches. In 2002*, the numbers of animals rehomed from these was 22,269 dogs, 40,019 cats, and 20,648 animals of miscellaneous species. A total of 2,517 healthy cats and dogs and 19,321 sick or injured dogs and cats were euthanased. Most of the healthy animals were euthanased because of local pressure on rehoming facilities.

* figures updated after the meeting

All dogs that are rehomed from RSPCA homes are microchipped, vaccinated and neutered and, should the Society take animals once they are discharged from the ASPA, then it would expect this to have been done before the animals are handed over.

Dogs entering RSPCA homes are usually kept for at least 21 days for assessment and preparation for homing. Prospective owners are encouraged to return dogs if they and the dogs do not suit each other. Return rates currently run at about 11%. The Society is starting a temperament testing and owner matching scheme to improve on the current rehoming success rate. This would also be applied to laboratory dogs. However, some aspects of socialisation and preparation would have to be the responsibility of the originating establishment to avoid laboratory animals needing lengthy stays in RSPCA kennels prior to homing. The cost of keeping a dog in a centre is around £6 per day. Therefore, every dog costs the Society a minimum of £130 for boarding alone; new owners pay a fee of around £80.

Public reaction

Embarking on a formal rehoming programme for laboratory animals is very different from the occasional ad hoc rehoming that occurs when a facility such as Perrycroft kennels or Hillgrove farm closes down, and both positive and negative public opinions are likely to be expressed.

The RSPCA is a very large diverse society and there are bound to be differing views both within the Society and within other animal welfare and animal rights organisations about the desirability and appropriateness of taking part in such a scheme. Although the majority of people would want to see individual animals rehomed, some feel that this would be both supporting and facilitating animal use in research.

Conclusion

Rehoming, is a desirable and practical alternative to euthanasing laboratory dogs, provided it is carried out carefully with due regard to all the issues regarding animal welfare, the prospective owner, the participating organisations, and the establishment. The RSPCA would be prepared to start with a one year trial rehoming a small number of dogs with a view to progressing to a more permanent scheme if the trial is successful.

A.4.4 Rehoming from the designated establishment's perspective

There are both advantages and disadvantages for a designated establishment to embark upon a rehoming programme. The advantages are that the establishment would be able to offer animals a longer life, which would be some recompense for their use in procedures and most animal care staff would welcome this. It would be an action that would demonstrate a compassionate concern for the animals that are used and thus comply with the spirit of the ASPA.

However, there is natural concern that, despite the good intentions, rehoming dogs might draw negative attention to an establishment. If the dogs proved difficult to settle in their home environment and, for example, expressed fearful behaviour, there could be a further adverse public reaction. Rehoming could be both labour intensive

and costly to carry out properly. There might be practical problems in dealing with dogs that do not adapt to their new environment and have to be returned for rehoming again.

A. 5 Practical experiences of rehoming laboratory animals

A.5.1 University of Glasgow

The University has successfully rehomed eight beagle pups and 2 adult dogs bred for a haemophilia study. Because the animals were specifically bred for the study there was plenty of time to develop a strategy for rehoming the animals. This included devising a socialisation programme for the pups and adult dogs and defining the main criteria for prospective owners.

It was decided that prospective owners had to be known to facility staff and to be experienced dog owners. The new owners undertook to have bitch pups spayed prior to their first season, to return the pups to the University if any problems arose, and to notify the University when the dog eventually died. Additional criteria were established for the prospective owners of adult dogs. These included having other dogs in the household to provide canine company, being able to understand the genetic background of the bitches, and having the resources to cope with adult animals which had not been house trained.

Pups were released for rehoming at 8 weeks of age. Once allocated to prospective owners, direct contact was established with the veterinary general practitioner who would take responsibility for providing veterinary care for the animals, to discuss their provenance and the implications of any genetic defects.

Of the eight pups, seven settled happily into their first home; one male pup was returned at 11 weeks and rehomed at 15 weeks. Both adult bitches settled happily into their first homes and no problems were reported. However, the difficulties associated with rehoming laboratory-bred adult dogs should not be underestimated. Placing such animals in a domestic environment is initially stressful and should not be undertaken unless it is judged to be in the best interests of the dog concerned.

The lessons learned from this experience were:

- Candidate dogs for rehoming must be of good temperament, well socialised and sufficiently appealing. Pups were rehomed more easily than adults.
- Success is higher in young dogs which can adapt to a new lifestyle.
- Adults should be spayed prior to release and their vaccination status confirmed.
- Prospective owners must be carefully selected for their suitability. They must be able to understand the implications of the genetic background of the bitches. They need to be experienced dog owners with at least one other dog in the home and have sufficient time and resources to cope with the dog, especially an adult which has not been house trained.
- A contingency plan for dealing with any returned animals is essential.

A.5.2 GlaxoWellcome – USA and UK experiences in the pharmaceutical industry

Animals are used within the pharmaceutical industry to support the discovery of new medicines. GW has clear objectives within this overall context of animal use, to ensure animals are only used when absolutely essential, to implement the 3Rs and to continually strive to improve animal welfare. This is all part of maintaining a compassionate culture towards the laboratory animals used by the company.

GW aims to minimise not only the numbers of animals used but also any surpluses arising. This applies to all animal species. With respect to dogs, the Company has set out to:

- identify situations in which dogs bred or acquired for scientific research, or for purposes associated with scientific research, might reasonably be regarded as surplus to the primary purpose;
- attempt, wherever possible, to minimise the number of dogs considered as surplus by identifying alternative valuable scientific uses;
- once other possibilities are exhausted consider whether these surplus dogs could be rehomed.

Issues to consider

Some dogs do occasionally become surplus, but it is difficult to predict sufficiently in advance the numbers in any one year. To decide whether rehoming was a good idea for the Company to pursue, we asked the following questions: could the animal have a good life as a pet; could the animal bring pleasure to potential new owners; would rehoming complement the Company's objectives and create the right Company culture; is it the right thing to do; how will society perceive this; does society want us to do this; and is there any danger that rehoming might be misconstrued by the public?

GW USA Adoption Programme

GW in the USA already has an adoption programme, which started in 1990 when a scientist adopted the animal he worked with. Interest in the idea developed and resulted in 13 adoptions of dogs in 1991. A more formal programme was then developed supported by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC). This was publicised with posters around GWRD sites, and brochures, and manned displays outside cafeterias provided information and opportunities for discussion.

Animals were screened prior to adoption with a behavioural assessment (utilising the site veterinarian and the opinions of the technicians and researchers who worked with the adoption candidates), and a full veterinary physical examination. Blood samples and faecal samples were taken for haematology, clinical chemistry, serology (in the case of rodents), heartworm, other parasites and pathogens. The potential for zoonosis was also considered. Vaccinations, neutering, and teeth cleaning were all carried out prior to rehoming.

Potential new owners were also screened through questionnaires asking why they wanted to adopt a laboratory animal, whether they already had pets, and what they would do if the rehoming did not work out. The nature of the scientific procedures the animals had undergone (if any) were explained, and they were introduced to the animal by the adoption programme manager. A network of colleagues who had experienced the rehoming process also proved to be a helpful resource. Prior to adoption the owners were given copies of health records, and vaccination and test results, together with a supply of essentials (feed, bedding, collar and lead) and advice on care, handling, and diet. The owners signed an adoption form, which committed them to providing veterinary cover. Contact with new owners was maintained and feedback sought on the progress of the animals.

To date 50 dogs, 10 minipigs and a few other species have been successfully rehomed. It was found that house training took on average 3 weeks, the dogs were sometimes nervous of carpets and grass, and vocalisation could be a problem as could a tendency for some dogs to roam, when not properly lead by their new owners. The adoption programme is considered successful for personnel and animals alike. Strong emphasis has been placed on choosing the correct animals for the adoption programme rather than attempting to adopt out every animal that is no longer needed for research.

UK experiences

In the UK, GW have been operating an informal rehoming process with a small number of puppies and adult dogs, rodents and rabbits all rehomed to staff or their families. Cats were also successfully rehomed when the breeding colony was closed down. In essence the process follows a similar approach to that used in the US. Animals are selected according to temperament and owners are selected as to their suitability. Animals are followed up with the new owners and home visits have been carried out. Experience has shown that dogs do best when re-homed to households that already have other dogs, and with owners that have time and commitment to give to the animal. Animals in the laboratory are not used to the external environment and initially may be frightened by strange noises and stimuli. The time taken to overcome these difficulties is minimised by careful selection of animals. In the future the intent is to build into the socialisation programme greater exposure to environmental stimuli that will help prepare the animals to cope with novel environments, so making them more amenable to rehoming if the need arises.

The personal view of the speaker at this point in time is that this is ‘the right thing to do’. The GW experience to date is that it is of benefit both to the new owners and the animals and is valued by GW employees. However it needs to be developed into a more formal programme and better evidence needs to be obtained that it works well, especially for the animals and for the new owners. Once this evidence, has been collected a formal proposal looking at costs and benefits will need to be approved by the GW ethical review process so it can be implemented fully as one of the ways of dealing animals that have fulfilled their role in the drug discovery and development process.

GW staff do not provide a sufficient pool of potential owners so it will be necessary to work with external rehoming agencies to identify suitable people. Behavioural advice is also being sought to help identify the best sort of preparatory training for selected

animals and the things that may be built in to the day to day activities to best prepare animals that may eventually leave the laboratory.

A.5.3 Aventis Pharma AG - Adoption of elderly laboratory beagles through an animal welfare organisation

Aventis Pharma AG, the former Hoechst Group, has successfully rehomed over 500 laboratory beagles in the last four years in Germany. The dogs had been used in pharmacology, pharmacokinetic/metabolism, toxicology and for breeding (before the company's own dog breeding facility was closed). The dogs had been housed in pens measuring 9m² for the first dog with 3m² for each additional dog. They were housed in groups of a minimum of two animals, and had access to both indoor and outdoor runs. They had bones, balls and rags to play with and regular human contact. Staff from the unit are urged to spend more time with the dogs than is needed just for cleaning the kennels. The dogs are used to people from outside the animal unit and to some contact with a wide range of visitors since Aventis conducts guided tours through laboratories and animal houses, and offers discussions with interested people.

Aventis Pharma's partners in the adoption scheme were Beagles Friends and Animals in Trouble (AIT), both members of the Deutscher Tierschutzbund (the German Alliance for the Protection of Animals) who, when the scheme was first set up, already had an existing co-operation with the University of Essen. These two groups act as facilitators in finding homes – they do not hold the dogs themselves, but take the animal to the home. Homes are found by word of mouth and through appeals to interested people via the media (television, radio, newspapers and magazines) and the Internet.

Preparatory activities within Aventis and AIT

Before the program was started, Aventis checked the legal situation in Germany and experts elaborated a formal contract covering the handing over of the animals. This contract must be completed for each dog and signed by a representative both of Aventis and AIT. Included in the contract are the details of the experiment which has been performed on the dog and of vaccination and worming. By signing the contract, AIT agrees to make sure that the new owner respects the animal welfare law, and guarantees that the dog is kept in an appropriate environment.

Dogs for rehoming are selected according to criteria such as age and character. (Originally rehoming was confined to dogs of less than 8 years but older dogs are now rehomed.) They are given a veterinary inspection and, where necessary, new owners are issued with the animal's medical history.

AIT visit and inspect potential new homes and tell the new owner about possible difficulties that may arise. For example, the dog may be sensitive to new sounds such as babies or lawnmowers or there may be problems with house training. New owners pay a 'symbolic' fee (DM 230-250) to AIT for dogs younger than 8 years, and a formal contract between AIT and new owners is signed. AIT follow up the progress of the dogs by keeping contact with letters and telephone calls, and giving advice if necessary on any particular difficulties. They also arrange regular meetings and unannounced inspections.

Results

The likelihood of the sort of problems described in Appendix A.4 arising is minimal. This may be due to the way the dogs have been kept in the facility. Beagles seem to adapt easily to new situations and there appeared to be no need for time consuming preparation stages. The dogs are able to learn quickly, they are not loners and like to have company.

House training is very often immediate and on average only takes a few days - if it took two weeks this would be a very long time. The relatively short period for house training is probably due to the fact that the dogs at Aventis have access to indoor and outdoor areas, and many of the dogs naturally keep their indoor pen clean.

There are very few veterinary problems and those that occur often do so when veterinarians make wrong diagnoses. Examples of problems are rupture of the decussate ligament (either from a predisposition or from exaggerated exercise) and cardiovascular problems (from exaggerated exercise). There can also be a problem for the existing dogs in the household when a new animal is brought in.

Only a few dogs of other breeds have been re-homed so far, but there seems to be a tendency for more problems to occur with these than with beagles. This appeared to be especially the case with German shepherd dogs.

Conclusions

Up to May 2000, 502 beagles, 9 German shepherds, 9 mongrels and 4 Labradors had all been rehomed through AIT. The result was happy dogs, happy new owners and a bond of trust between AIT and people in industry working with animals. The negative aspects were the aggressive and unjustified accusations by extremist anti-vivisectionists mainly against AIT. These are however decreasing.

This is a labour intensive and time-consuming procedure, but is recommended for the sake of the dogs. The precondition however is the establishment of a well-organised partnership and co-operation between the industry and the animal welfare organisations.

A.5.4 Experiences from the Animal Health Trust, a veterinary research institute

The Animal Health Trust (AHT) aims to be pre-eminent in the understanding of diseases in animals through scientific endeavour and its application to animal welfare. The Trust aims to improve diagnosis, prevention and cure of disease; to provide a clinical referral service for veterinary surgeons in practice; and to promote post-graduate education. It is the Trust's policy to rehome healthy animals used in scientific procedures, and many ex-experimental animals are now family pets.

The research goals mean that the Trust has a wide range of animal species to consider for rehoming. This includes dogs, cats, guinea pigs, sheep, poultry, ponies and horses. Smaller laboratory species such as mice and rats are generally used in terminal studies because tissue samples are required post mortem. However, there have been isolated occasions where an animal that has not undergone procedures has been re-homed.

Home Office permission for rehoming is built into the project licences. Animals that are suitable for rehoming will be released from the study as soon as the final procedure has been completed. They can then be viewed for rehoming and discharged. Arrangements can be made to obtain Home Office authority for rehoming animals for which there is no specific authority on the project licence for discharge as a companion animal. Once this authority has been received from the Home Office a suitable home will be sought.

The NACWO will find a suitable home for a discharged animal amongst staff and their family and friends. This enables a direct link to be maintained with the homed animal and to have a member of staff indirectly responsible for their welfare. The new owner will be asked to read and sign an agreement, which stipulates conditions of homing and disclaims the Trust from future veterinary care of the animal.

All animals that are rehomed receive a full veterinary health inspection carried out by the NVS or their Deputy prior to rehoming. All vaccination, worming and clinical health details are recorded on this certificate. All animals have microchip identification. The Certificate of Health, signed by the Veterinary Surgeon, is given to the candidate owners who are asked to sign an agreement to the details concerning the animals' health. All candidates are strongly advised to insure their new pet.

Problems

There is a possibility of veterinary problems, which arise after an animal has been rehomed being brought to the AHT without referral. There has been one incidence of a poor home being found despite thorough vetting of the candidate. The animal was returned to the Trust for a short while before a replacement home was found. (Homers are always urged to return an animal if any problems arise they cannot deal with.) The number of animals to home may exceed the homes available. In such cases the animals are kept at the Trust until a home is found.

Benefits

The Trust finds that rehoming animals is very beneficial for staff morale - those staff responsible for the animals' care feel strongly about their role in their animals' welfare. Rehoming is the ideal route for animals that have completed a study with no adverse reactions. It has obvious benefits to animals, humans and research.

A. 6 Meeting Conclusion

The meeting concluded with general agreement that it would be useful for LASA to set up a working group to progress rehoming issues and this was established in the early part of 2001.

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