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**T**he University of Illinois at Chicago has been accredited by AAALAC International since 1970. But what is AAALAC? And what does it mean to be accredited? This issue of the *BRL Bulletin* will answer these questions and will provide guidelines on preparation of laboratories for the AAALAC site visit that will occur on November 10th and 11th.

AAALAC is a private, non-profit organization that promotes the humane treatment of animals in science through a voluntary accreditation program. Accreditation by AAALAC indicates a high quality animal care and use program and a commitment by the institution to provide high quality, humane, animal care. It demonstrates that the animal care program goes above and beyond the legal requirements established and promulgated in the Animal Welfare Act. The accreditation process not only seeks to enhance animal care, it promotes best research practices and procedures that maximize scientific validity. AAALAC accreditation demonstrates accountability on the part of the animal care program to the public and to funding agencies. Many funding sources recommend accreditation, and some even rely on it to determine that an institution follows appropriate regulations and policies; in fact, it simplifies institutional eligibility for NIH funding. For the institution, it is a valuable recruitment tool to attract the best scientists as it is tangible evidence that the institution shows a commitment to the highest quality research and humane animal care.

## History

AAALAC has its roots in the Animal Care Panel (ACP), an organization created in the late 1940s by Chicago area veterinarians from major research institutions (including the University of Illinois at Chicago), who felt the need for a forum in which to exchange information on the care and management of animals and on the design of animal facilities. In 1952, they published *Standards for the Care of the Dog Used in Medical Research*, and developed, in 1959, a Professional Standards Committee to formulate standards of care for all laboratory

animals, evaluate allegations of inadequate animal care, and provide objective review, if invited by an institution.

In 1963, the Animal Facilities Accreditation Board (AFAB) of the ACP, originally known as the Animal Facilities Certification Board, proposed the creation of an accreditation program to help facilities voluntarily evaluate their programs. Through this accreditation program, each facility would have site visits performed by qualified professionals. The first pilot visits were conducted at Indiana University Medical College, the University of Southern California, the University of California at Los Angeles, and the University of California at San Francisco. Originally, the accreditation program was financed by seven allied organizations, but it was soon recognized that a privately operated program was needed. With this realization came the creation of the American Association for Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care (AAALAC) on April 8, 1965. This organization consisted of 14 charter member organizations that provided financial support. The National Advisory Committee of the AFAB became the Board of Trustees, who determined board members' terms of office, performed program administration, created forms for site visits, processed applications for accreditation, and selected consultants. This effort was accomplished one year before the enactment of the Laboratory Animal Welfare Act – now known as the Animal Welfare Act – which contains the federal regulations that govern the care of laboratory animals in research.

## AAALAC Today

In 1996, the organization changed its name to the Association for the Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care International, to reflect its broadening influence on accreditation of laboratory animal care programs worldwide. Today, more than 980 programs in 44 countries are accredited.

AAALAC's objective as an organization is to

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enhance the quality and uniformity of animal care and use in biomedical research, teaching, and testing, thus ensuring high regard for animal welfare. AAALAC is not a government agency. It does not develop policies or regulations. Instead, AAALAC relies on publications such as the *Guide (Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, NCR 2011)* and the *Ag Guide (Guide for the Care and Use of Agricultural Animals in Research and Teaching, FASS 2010)* to determine criteria for accreditation. Performance standards, rather than engineering standards, are emphasized. Thus, institutions are measured by the outcomes they achieve and not by how they accomplish these goals.

AAALAC is directed by 70 professional member societies, including such organizations as the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the American Hospital Association. Governance is by a Board of Trustees, which is comprised of one representative from each of the member organizations who serve, at most, two three-year terms. The Board of Trustees guides all of the organization's activities, makes policy decisions, assumes fiduciary responsibilities, appoints members to the Council on Accreditation, and approves the Council's activities. The 62-member Council on Accreditation is comprised of animal care and use professionals and researchers, each serving a four-year term. The Council meets three times per year (in January, May, and September). This Council is the action center of AAALAC in that it recommends policies and procedures to the Board, schedules and performs site visits, assesses site visit reports, and recommends actions for consideration by the Board. The Council may also employ ad hoc consultants who have expertise beyond traditional laboratory animal species or who may have competencies in a unique discipline. These ad hoc members accompany Council Members on site visits to augment the animal care and use program review process.

### **The Accreditation Process**

During an accreditation site visit, representatives from AAALAC evaluate all aspects of an institution's animal care program, including institutional policies, animal husbandry, veterinary care, and physical plant issues. Accreditation is available to any institution with an active life sciences program that

uses animals in research, teaching, or testing or that imports or produces animals for these purposes. Species covered include traditional laboratory animals, farm animals, wildlife, and aquatic animals.

The accreditation process begins with an application that is submitted to AAALAC. This application contains a thorough description of the institution's animal care and use program referred to as the Program Description. The Program Description provides comprehensive details on animal care and use as outlined in the five sections of the *Guide* and in the *Ag Guide* as appropriate. Details on a diverse set of topics are presented such as: animal species used in the program; facilities and equipment available; technical proficiency; administrative support; Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee policies and procedures; animal husbandry; veterinary care procedures; the institution's occupational health program; animal experimentation involving hazardous agents; and special considerations, such as prolonged animal restraint and multiple major operative survival procedures. Every aspect of animal husbandry ranging from the type and quality of food and bedding used to ventilation rates and illumination levels is evaluated. AAALAC evaluation comes at a cost. Applicant institutions are assessed a fee, the amount of which is determined by the size of the facility. Supplemental fees may be required for additional site visits.

After the application is submitted, AAALAC assembles a team of site visitors that includes at least one AAALAC Council member and one or more other individuals that are either Council members or consultants to Council. The site visitors are charged with performing a thorough review of the Program Description and a walk-through inspection of the facility. The actual site visit may last several days and usually encompasses a page-by-page review of the Program Description, a review of animal care committee records along with a subset of animal care protocols, an inspection of all animal facilities, and inspections of randomly selected investigator laboratories. All aspects of the site visit and the institution's program are kept confidential. At the completion of the site visit, the team members conduct an exit interview with institutional representatives to discuss their

findings. The site visitors divulge whether or not they intend to recommend that the institution receive AAALAC accreditation at that time and if so at what level. During the exit interview, the veterinary staff has the opportunity to address issues that could adversely affect the institution's accreditation status and clarify what steps need to be taken to address any troubling issues.

Following the visit, the site visitors compile a summary report that is submitted along with supporting documents to AAALAC Council. The summary report is deliberated at the next AAALAC Council meeting, and the Council makes a recommendation to the AAALAC Board regarding the institution's accreditation status. Institutions may be granted full accreditation, provisional accreditation, or accreditation may be withheld. Provisional accreditation means that AAALAC standards have not been met and that deficiencies have been identified that must be corrected within 24 months; if they are not corrected in this time frame, accreditation is withheld. A program is not considered accredited until such deficiencies are corrected, and the facility may be revisited to verify these corrections.

### **Reaccreditation**

Institutions must submit an updated Program Description and undergo a site visit every three years to maintain accreditation. At the time of reassessment, the institution may be granted continued full accreditation, conditional accreditation, deferred accreditation, probational accreditation, or accreditation may be revoked. Conditional accreditation means that the program has correctable deficiencies that can and must be corrected within one year or less, while deferred accreditation deficiencies must be corrected within two months. If deferred deficiencies are not addressed in two months, a fully accredited institution drops to probational accreditation status. Probational accreditation is reserved for programs that have significant deficiencies that must be corrected within a maximum of 12 months. The program must have these deficiencies corrected or accreditation is revoked after the 12 month period has elapsed. Programs in which accreditation has been revoked must reapply for accreditation. Decisions regarding accreditation may be appealed to the Board of Trustees.

### **How Should You Prepare for the Site Visit?**

As mentioned earlier, the site visit team randomly selects investigators who have approved animal use protocols to be part of the site visit.

#### *How does the site visit team choose which laboratories to visit?*

The Program Description that the site visitors review includes tables that summarize approved animal use protocols that involve the use of hazardous materials, unusual techniques, surgical procedures, especially those involving survival surgical procedures, prolonged restraint, or food and water restriction. The site visit team often requests to visit the laboratories that perform the activities included on these tables. However, the site visitors may wish to visit the laboratories of other investigators with approved active protocols.

#### *What happens if your laboratory area is chosen for a visit by the site visit team?*

The site visitors review the relevant active protocol (s) and the experience and qualifications of the personnel involved. They also visit the site where the study is being conducted and inspect the area, including any support equipment that is used as part of the protocol.

#### *What should you do to prepare your laboratory?*

- It is vital that the laboratory and associated support areas are clean and organized.
- A hard copy of the protocol along with approved modifications must be available in a central location in the lab so that all individuals on the protocol have read it and have access to it
- All personnel with animal contact must have:
  - ◊ Completed the required online training courses
  - ◊ Be approved on the protocol
  - ◊ Have enrolled in the UIC Occupational Health Program
- Controlled drugs (i.e., ketamine, buprenorphine) need to be stored properly and not expired
  - ◊ Expired controlled substances must be returned to the UIC pharmacy for reverse distribution.
  - ◊ Records for controlled substances need to be available and up-to-date.
  - ◊ The usage forms must be stored with the drugs in a locked cabinet.

- Check your inventory of non-controlled substances; they must not be expired.
  - ◊ If you maintain expired drugs for terminal studies, these materials must be labeled and stored separately from non-expired materials (see policy on the Use of Expired Medical Materials; <http://research.uic.edu/compliance/acc>).
- Any diluted drugs placed into secondary vials must be fully labeled with contents, concentration, and expiration date.
- If survival surgical procedures are performed in rodents:
  - ◊ Laboratory personnel must be aware of the methods for proper preparation of a sterile surgical site and the practices necessary to maintain a sterile operating field.
  - ◊ Be prepared to discuss the use of perioperative analgesics in their animals.
  - ◊ **Perioperative records must be kept for one year on any animal that undergoes a surgical procedure and must be readily available if the site visitors have questions.**
- If non-survival surgical procedures are being performed in rodents:
  - ◊ Make sure to read the new ACC guidelines regarding non-survival surgical procedures (<http://research.uic.edu/compliance/acc>).
  - ◊ **For procedures lasting more than 15 minutes, surgical records must be kept for one year on any animal that undergoes a surgical procedure and must be readily available if the site visitors have questions.**
- If there is a CO2 euthanasia station in the laboratory, there are new CO2 guidelines that must be posted (version 4.2):
  - <https://research.uic.edu/compliance/animal-care-use-acc/policies-guidelines/>
  - ◊ All CO2 stations must have a flowmeter, and the individuals using the machine must know the appropriate flow rate.
- If anyone needs guidance on how to prepare his/her laboratory for the site visit, please contact a BRL veterinarian. For more information on AAALAC, consult the website at [www.aaalac.org](http://www.aaalac.org).

*What happens if you are in the facility during the site visit?*

The site visitors may ask questions about your research and experience. Be prepared to know what protocol you are working on, what training you have received, who to contact in the event of a sick/injured animal, and how to report animal welfare concerns. If you do not know the answers to these questions, please contact your area veterinarian immediately! As a reminder, to have access to the animal facility you must be approved on the protocol, have completed the ACC and rodent user training courses, if applicable, have met with the area veterinarian for a facility orientation, and have been enrolled in the Occupational Health Program.

## **Announcements**

### AAALAC Town Hall Meetings

In lieu of the upcoming triennial AAALAC accreditation site visit on November 10-11, the BRL veterinary staff will be conducting two town hall meetings. Three years ago when AAALAC visited UIC, they visited more than 25 labs. The purpose of the town hall meetings is to provide laboratories with background information on AAALAC, the site visit process, and what investigators can do to prepare for a lab visit. The town hall meetings will be held virtually on Tuesday, October 27th at 11:00 am and Thursday, October 29th at 2:00 pm.

### New BRL Training Course: Aseptic Technique and Perioperative Care in Rodents

The purpose of the course is to provide training on key perioperative principles for personnel conducting survival surgery with rodents. The course includes information on instrument sterilization, surgical area preparation, animal preparation, aseptic technique, and postoperative care. The class does not cover specific surgical techniques. Prior experience in surgery is not required to attend. The class session includes a lecture and hands-on exercises. To register for the class, please sign up on the BRL website.

