

## **In Defense of Pound Dogs in Teaching and Research**

The use of dogs from civic pounds in medical research and teaching is the

subject of some concern in animal welfare circles today. This matter was the subject of a four-page comment in a recent issue of your *Int J Stud Anim Prob* (2 (5):241-244, 1981). The title of that item was provocatively given as "Sewer Science and Pound Seizure" by author Kenneth P. Stoller. I notice that one of your Editors-in-Chief, Andrew Rowan, is reported in *Federation Proceedings* (40 (13), November 1981) to have submitted a report to Senate hearings on this and related matters. To both of these items, I feel some counter comments are needed.

It seems to be overlooked by too many that the use of dogs in science relates in large measure to the instruction of medical and veterinary students. The dog has long been the standard model in basic disciplines within medical teaching. By the use of dogs, the medical student is exposed to the composite realities of physiology and surgery. Following such exposure, students seem to have fuller conceptual capacities for holistic medical situations in patients. This is how it is, though room for change is always there.

Many of the dogs used in medical teaching are obtained from pounds. This does not mean that "sewer" teaching results. Furthermore, dogs used in medical research obtained from pounds can be very satisfactory subjects for scientific study. The connotations involved in the terms used by Stoller are not only provocative but misleading. For example, the term "seizure" relates to what happens when the dog is taken from the street. It does not properly describe the legal negotiation that takes place when an impounded dog is transferred to an institution of research and learning for use prior to the destruction that has already been its sentence. This use relieves the user of the ethical burden of being the cause of the animals' demise. Furthermore, if some of these animals are given quarantine and conditioning by the institution selecting them and using them, they can make perfectly satisfactory subjects for research and instruction.

To correct what I consider to be some misleading statements, I think certain additional factors in the procurement and use of dogs in the medical sciences must be borne in mind. Dogs transferred from the pound, after the lapse of time prescribed for owners to retrieve them, represent the excess population of urban dogs which cause a civic problem today (*Appl Anim Ethol* 3:101-104, 1977). Every dog has his day, it is said: sad to say, the unclaimed impounded dog has had *its* day. These animals have been culled from the pet population. That they can be used, before their end, to obtain and convey new and continuing medical knowledge would appear to be an elementary form of conservation.

The purpose-bred production of dogs destines animals for the sole use and end as materials of science. To be sure, a given animal may have been saved from neglect, abuse and discard. This animal has not, however, experienced the bond with mankind in a truly domestic situation, which must be assumed to be the essential role of most dogs. Their production involves expensive facilities, trained staff, and all the elaborate refinement of chronic animal maintenance. Unlike the pound dog, the purpose-bred animal involves a considerable investment in funds and personnel. The purpose-bred dog population also involves a through-put of individuals that is not reversible if the demands for numbers are reduced. Therefore, dog breeding in research kennels is not the route to conservation and economy.

The use of impounded dogs undoubtedly involves institutional obligations, and perhaps it is more to the point to have these considerations emphasized at this time. Institutions receiving such animals must quarantine them and condition them over a given period of time. During this time, the institutions must be entirely willing to return the displaced animal to its original owner, should this prove possible. The animal should not, however, be handed over to any other party. Humane practice must be afforded to these animals at all levels, including in-

stitutional policy, animal care practice and scientific procedure. Much of this should be done under qualified professional supervision. Records must be maintained on every animal for periodic inspection by authorized enquirers. Whenever possible, the use of these animals should be limited to acute studies.

It is an associated obligation, which should be borne by the community, to have an alternative home-finding system for lost and discarded pet dogs in the catchment area of the pound. Usually this can only be done through the activity of a local humane society. Such societies require significant civic funding, without a concomitant loss of their autonomy.

I recognize that those who have criticized the use of pound dogs have some of the facts right; I believe that their cases do not lack fact so much as they lack balance. A clear view through this forest of various circumstances and sentiments is not easy. One feels suspicious, therefore, of any facile appraisal and peremptory judgment on any of the arbitrary uses of animals.

Transfer of unclaimed impounded dogs to legitimate centers of learning is only another mode of animal usage and exploitation that is unavoidable if the circumstances of how we actually live are to be looked at squarely. The world is found by most of us to be a hard place from time to time. Animals sharing in our existence share in this reality. One very harsh reality is the annual destruction of 15 million stray and discarded dogs in North America. Constant recognition of this blunt fact is required by all those involved in animal advocacy.

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