Coping with Grief in the Laboratory Animal Setting

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May 10, 2012
Coping with Grief in the Laboratory Animal Setting

- Recognizing grief in laboratory animal care
- Coping mechanisms
- The 4th R: Remembering
Laboratory Animals

• Qualities of a lab animal caregiver:
  • Loves animals
  • Compassion
  • Kindness

You + =

• Result: Human-Animal Bond
Laboratory Animals

• Euthanasia
  • Anticipatory grief
  • Grief following death
    – denial
    – depression
    – anger
    – acceptance
    – bargaining
Laboratory Animals

• Avoidance
  • Avoid strong bonds with animals
    – May affect your performance and animal comfort
  • Refusing to perform euthanasia
    – Someone else will have to euthanize the animals
    – Cause stress to the animal
      » Unfamiliar to the animal
      » Your presence would have provided comfort
    – Cause stress to your coworkers
Grief

- Compassion fatigue
  - Irritability
  - Impatience
  - Psychosomatic illness
  - Sleeplessness
  - Burnout

Impacts individual as well as the workplace
Grief

• Consequences of bottled-up emotions in the workplace
  • High absenteeism
  • High staff turnover
  • Poor teamwork
  • Strong resistance to changes
  • Negative attitude toward management
Coping

• Recognize your emotions
• Address them
  • Personal
    – Physical health
    – Mental and emotional health
  • Professional
    – Attitude towards your career/job
    – What can you do while you’re at work
    – How well do you do your job
Coping

• Personal strategies—get healthy
  • Make your health a priority
  • Health-building activities such as exercise, massage, yoga, meditation.
  • Eat healthy foods
  • Drink plenty of water
  • Organize your life, be proactive
  • Reserve your life energy for worthy causes / Choose your battles
Coping

• Personal strategies
  • Reevaluate why you work in animal research
  • Recognize the benefits an animal receives from a caring and compassionate worker
  • Visualize the benefits of animal research
  • Establish a support system
  • Care for a pet at home
Coping

• Professional strategies for coping
  • Perform competent, caring euthanasia for animals
  • Communicate with your supervisor about your concerns
  • Seek education and training, learn about the needs of the various species
  • Take pride in your skills that accentuate humane care for animals
  • Other employment options
Coping

• The 4th “R”: Remembering

“Whether of a sacred or secular nature, acknowledgment, memorial, or tribute services and ceremonies provide ways to assist individuals in their coping process.”

Remembering

• Animal memorials

Object
• Engraved stone
• Plaque
• Piece of art
• Garden

Ceremony
• Formal
• Informal
• Public
• Private
• Religious
• Secular
Remembering

Stones dedicated in 1923 to animals sacrificed in slaughter-houses in Japan.

Animal memorial pagoda of the Korean Food and Drug Administration.
Animal memorial at a biomedical research institution in Korea
Remembering

TO THOSE WHO GIVE THEIR LIVES

FOR THE WELFARE OF MANKIND

University of Rochester School of Medicine
Remembering

“We, who choose to surround ourselves with lives even more temporary than our own, live within a fragile circle easily and often breached. Unable to accept its awful gaps, we would still live no other way. We cherish the memory as the only certain immortality. Never fully understanding the necessary plan.”

Anonymous

Plaques displayed in Covance, Inc. facilities
In tribute to research animals whose contributions have saved millions of human and animal lives and reduced suffering worldwide.

From the animal technicians, supervisors, managers, veterinarians and research scientists who care for research animals.

Merck Research Laboratories
Remembering Catholic ceremony

- St. Francis of Asisi
- Annual blessing of the pets
Remembering

Asia
Buddhist and Shinto ceremonies

Memorial stone at Tsukuba Research Institute, Tsukuba, Japan. Inscription on the stone visible behind the altar is "Animal Memorial March 25, 1992" (translated from Japanese). Individuals approach the altar and participate in oshōkō, the ceremonial burning of incense.
Remembering

North America

University of Guelph hosted the first secular gathering to remember the animals used in research in 1993.
Remembering

University of Washington
- Services for people that donate their bodies to research, extended to include animals
- Ring a bell for each species used in research

University of Texas Health Science Center and Baylor College of Medicine
- Tropical Storm Allison 2001
- Services for research animals lost in the flooding
In tribute to the research animals that died as a result of Tropical Storm Allison we invite you to a

Memorial Service

Friday
October 5, 2001
3:00 p.m.
University of Texas Health Science Center Medical School
Room 3001
ID Badges required

This day is always filled with sadness for those who loved and cared for you. We keep your memory alive in our hearts.
Remembering

- Initiating gatherings at your institution
  - Be prepared for resistance from administration
  - Find a supporter
  - Prepare a mission statement
  - Give thought to who should attend
  - Be careful with the wording
Personal ways to remember

- Plant a tree
- Find your own personal way
- Pray
Share

• Share your coping mechanisms and ways of remembering
  • If not here, share them privately with your coworkers.

• Any questions?
• Thank you!
References and Resources

- Iliff SA. An additional “R”: Remembering the animals. ILAR Journal 43(1): 38-47.
- Compassion Fatigue Awareness Project. http://www.compassionfatigue.org/