Preparing Your Lab for Accreditation Inspections

Every three years the University undergoes a re-accreditation evaluation by AAALAC (the Association for the Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care). This international non-profit organization’s approval is recognized by grant agencies and private research foundations as the measure of a quality biomedical research program. Some agencies and organizations require this status for eligibility for competitive grant opportunities.

The UT Health Science Campus has been accredited since 1981. This will be the first year that the entire UT campus-wide program has undergone this process. This brings together the Health Science Campus with all animal research-based programs from the Main Campus—including the Wolfe Hall Vivarium, Psychology, Kinesiology and the Lake Erie Center.

Each Principal Investigator should be prepared for the prospect that their particular lab and their approved research protocols may be selected for auditing. To prepare for this, here are a few suggestions for you and your staff.

1. Be familiar with the specifics of your approved animal research protocol. Be sure that all staff named on the protocol are well versed in the scope of the work and current status of your activities. Have your approved protocol (and any amendments) on hand, as you may be asked to produce a copy.

2. Self-examine your lab operation. You lab should have a copy of the NIH Guide for the Care and Use of Animals in Research. If your work involves USDA regulated species, your lab should also have a copy of the Animal Welfare Act. Ask the DLAR office to send you a pdf version or hard copy of these documents if you need them. Much of the AAALAC evaluation will be based directly on “The Guide”

3. Your lab records involving animals should be readily available in the event that a site-visitor may ask about them. This would focus principally on animals used in research studies.

4. Review the orderliness of your lab operation for an unannounced visit. Review your storage and record keeping for any controlled substances related to your animal work. This includes detailed attention to product expiration dates.
5. Inform your lab personnel of this site visit so that they too can self-assess their role on the research team. Observe all regular policies on appropriate lab apparel and personal protective equipment.

6. Welcome the site visitors and feel free to inform them of the nature of your research. They are our peers in biomedical science in academia, private industry and governmental agencies, and they have a genuine interest in your work.

What is AAALAC?

AAALAC International is a private, nonprofit organization that promotes the humane treatment of animals in science through voluntary accreditation and assessment programs. AAALAC stands for the "Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care."

More than 800 companies, universities, hospitals, government agencies and other research institutions in 32 countries have earned AAALAC accreditation, demonstrating their commitment to responsible animal care and use. These institutions volunteer to participate in AAALAC’s program, in addition to complying with the local, state and federal laws that regulate animal research.

Some of the institutions that have earned AAALAC accreditation include the Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, The American Red Cross, and the National Institutes of Health.

Why is AAALAC's role important?

For some, animal research is a controversial topic. But like others in the animal welfare arena, AAALAC endorses the use of animals to advance medicine and science when there are no non-animal alternatives, and when it is done in an ethical and humane way.

When animals are used, AAALAC works with institutions and researchers to serve as a bridge between progress and animal well-being. This is done through AAALAC’s voluntary accreditation process in which research programs demonstrate that they meet the minimum standards required by law, and are also going the extra step to achieve excellence in animal care and use.

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