DLAR News Bulletin
Summer – 2009

The UT Animal Acquisition Process

Obtaining research animals from pre-approved vendors is the simplest, most direct transaction for obtaining animal subjects for approved studies. Commercial vendors have genetically managed production facilities which are intensely monitored for animal diseases, and established systems for shipping and tracking animal requisitions.

Obtaining animals from all other sources requires customized evaluations and information exchanges between the sending and receiving institutions. This service is recharged for at most academic research institutions. Since the majority of these transactions involve laboratory mice and rats, the following narrative will focus exclusively on rodents.

**Animal Health-** All non-vendor acquisitions require a detailed inquiry into the health of the animal population from which the specific individual animals will originate. The UT DLAR health monitoring program has been established to exclude and detect the presence of specific diseases. Avoiding the acquisition of contaminated animals is the first step in this process. DLAR’s goal is to provide a practical, effective program of disease avoidance to prevent the introduction of pathogens that can affect research results or cause costly disruptions of research programs.

- **Disease History-** In occasional cases, where the sending institution does not regularly test for the same diseases, supplementary testing may be required before an informed judgment may be made about the proposed transaction. This may delay the process.

- **Supplementary Testing-** Delays may also occur if the sending institution does not respond to information requests, supplementary testing requests and other pertinent information.

- **Risk Assessment-** In the event that the disease history of the facility of origin is unsatisfactory and incompatible with risks to UT animal colonies, the acquisition process may be suspended until conditions change and allow a revised risk assessment. In some instances rodents with adventitious pathogens may require re-derivation (embryo, caesarian, etc.) before they are suitable for shipment to the University. The principal caveat about animal disease testing programs is that they are retrospective in nature, and most effective and meaningful when conducted at regular intervals.

Depending on the policies or procedures of the sending institution, an Animal Health Risk Assessment may not be feasible prior to obtaining an approved Material Transfer Agreement (MTA) from the UT Office of Research Development. This document is now required for virtually every animal shipment from non-vendor and non-federal institute sources. It is possible that even after obtaining this document, the proposed animal acquisition may not be allowed due to animal health issues. Some sending institutions may complicate this process by not providing health information until after the MTA has been completed.
DLAR encourages, if possible, a preliminary health assessment of the proposed population source before engaging in a lengthy dialog on intellectual property issues related to a MTA.

Most research institutes test their animal colonies on a quarterly basis, whereas commercial vendors have more intense monitoring programs. Since this process may extend over weeks or months, it is possible that newly obtained testing data could negate the acquisition process. Testing is a dynamic process and the most current information is ordinarily given the greatest weight in judging risk. Some diseases, such as Mouse Hepatitis Virus or Mouse Parvovirus require extended periods of negative colony tests before it is presumed that a problem was resolved.

Other organisms, such as Mouse Norovirus, are considered non-pathogenic (for now) and are tolerated in the majority of academic research institutions in the U.S.. For more specific information on organisms for which DLAR has exclusionary policies contact the office at Ext. 4310. Rodent Health Monitoring programs, including excluded diseases, were discussed in detail in the Spring 2009 edition of this Bulletin (available on request in pdf format).

**Animal Space Planning-** While every effort is made to facilitate the acquisition of research animals, it is essential to discuss housing arrangements in advance to assure that appropriate housing space is available or prepared. For example, immunocompromised or genetically modified animals may require specialized caging or other specific conditions that may not be available with current resources. Discussing these requirements in advance with DLAR staff will avoid these predicaments.

**Quarantine of Incoming Animals-** A period of isolation is scheduled for incoming shipments from non-vendor sources. This policy is to reduce the risk of introducing adventitious pathogens into UT animal facilities. Since these isolation procedures require housing in a negatively pressured room, timing these shipments is important, as the number of such areas is limited. Notwithstanding the isolation of these animals, some limited activities may be feasible, such as mating animals for approved research activities. Direct animal contact, however, is limited to DLAR personnel during this period. The details of quarantine and access are determined on a case by case basis, according to the Animal Health Risk Assessment. Costs for placing sentinel animals in quarantine spaces and screening them for rodent pathogens are recharged to the investigators account.

**Ordering Vendor-Sourced Animals-** All research animals ordered for work at the University must be pre-approved by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC). Based on this approval, an investigator may place an animal order with the DLAR animal acquisitions office in the basement of the Health Education Building (Ext. 4310). Merle Heineke, DLAR Associate Director, must approve every animal order and validate the requisition by ink stamp prior to its delivery to the Purchasing Department. All animal acquisitions are received directly by DLAR. No other arrangements may be made directly between investigators and representatives of the sending institution which do not follow these procedures.

**New Faculty Recruitment-** All department chairs and recruitment committees are encouraged and invited to schedule a meeting with DLAR staff during recruiting visits. This would provide the candidate with the opportunity to inquire about available housing equipment, special facilities, services and per diem charges. In the event that the candidate may be intending to transfer research animals to DLAR facilities from their current institution, it would also provide a perspective on the transfer process.