

William S. Middleton Memorial Veterans Hospital  
IACUC Policy #06-13

### **Monitoring Animals at Risk of Developing Protocol-Related Morbidity or Mortality**

**Policy:** Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) require special clinical monitoring for animals during times of increased risk of morbidity or mortality. Details of the IACUC requirements in this regard are provided below.

#### **Responsibilities:**

##### **1. Role of the Investigator**

Animals needing increased clinical monitoring must be conspicuously identified as such (ex. cage cards). It is the responsibility of the investigator to provide such identification as well as the most likely signs of unplanned illness posted on the cage card.

It is important to note that veterinary/staff monitoring is not intended to relieve the Principal Investigator of his/her responsibility for monitoring his/her animals. Rather, it will independently augment the investigators' activities and will serve as a means for improving communication between the investigators, ARF staff, the VMC, and the ARC. The Principal Investigator will continue to be required to provide adequate monitoring of animals assigned to his/her protocol. A description of the monitoring as well as planned animal care, interventions, and endpoint criteria must be included in the protocol. The protocol must also include any strain or protocol specific tendencies that might be mistaken for unplanned illness. This also must be posted on the cage card. It is highly recommended that *Lab Animal Science* 1999 "Body Condition Scoring: A Rapid and Accurate Method for Assessing Health Status in Mice" be used in the endpoint criteria for any protocol in which animals are expected to not thrive due to genotype or experimental manipulations (see policy #05 Pain and Distress and policy #27 Tumor Burden). A list must be posted in the animal housing room providing contact information of lab staff authorized to act as representatives in the event of the Principal Investigator's absence.

##### **2. Role of the Veterinary Medical Consultant (VMC) and Animal Research Facility (ARF) Staff**

All animals identified as needing increased clinical monitoring are observed at least once daily by the animal care staff. If an animal dies, becomes moribund, or develops signs of unplanned illness, the VMC and the investigator or lab representative will be informed of the condition of the animal. Should the endpoint criteria for euthanasia or interventions for sick animals found in the approved protocol be inappropriate or ineffective, the VMC will conduct clinical observations, and when necessary, decide

on the appropriate intervention. The need for euthanasia/interventions by the VMC will be based on the clinical condition of the animal(s). If possible, the type of intervention chosen by the VMC will be selected so as to not interfere with the study based on consultation with the Principal Investigator or lab representative. In urgent cases when the responsible investigative staff is not available in a reasonable amount of time, the VMC has the authority to implement appropriate intervention, which may include medical or surgical therapy or euthanasia.

### 3. IACUC Oversight

At each meeting, the IACUC will be informed of any animals for which endpoint criteria for euthanasia or interventions for sick animals (as found in the approved protocol) proved to be inappropriate or ineffective and the actions taken by the VMC. The IACUC will also be informed if the rate of protocol-related morbidity or mortality exceeds the rates described by the approved protocol.

During the protocol review process, the IACUC will assess the risk of animal morbidity and mortality that may result from the proposed procedures and make suggestions to minimize unplanned morbidity and mortality.

**Questions:** Any questions on this policy should be directed to the A.O. (280-7222).

#### References:

- *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals*, NRC, 2011.
- Code of Federal Regulations, Title 9, Chapter 1, Subchapter A - Animal Welfare
- VHA Handbook 1200.07
- AVMA Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals (2013 Edition)
- *Lab Animal Science* 1999 "Body Condition Scoring: A Rapid and Accurate Method for Assessing Health Status in Mice", Vol. 49, No3, June 1999.

**Effective date:** A draft was distributed to ARF users in a memorandum dated 3/22/00. This draft was updated and the policy approved at the IACUC meeting on 11/27/01. Subsequent updates and approvals on: 01/23/06; 03/10/08, 3/02/2009, 5/10/2010, 1/11/2011, 5/07/2012, 9/11/2013.