

Editorial

Primate Medicine Then and Now— 40 Years of the APV Workshop

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In October, 2012 the Association of Primate Veterinarians (APV, www.primat vets.org) held its 40th Workshop in St Paul, Minneapolis. While an excellent annual event in and of itself, this was also an opportunity for the organization and its members to reflect on the origins of the Workshop and how primate medicine has evolved over the past 40 years.

APV was originally conceived as an association for clinical primate veterinarians, and attendance at the Workshop was limited specifically to those veterinarians who spent at least 50% of their day providing clinical care to nonhuman primates. The concept of a meeting devoted strictly to clinical medicine of nonhuman primates grew from feelings of isolation among primate veterinarians, especially in the early years after the formation of the National Primate Research Centers (NPRCs).² Textbooks and journals were not available that specifically described the physiology, behavior, medicine, and pathology of the many species of primates being used for research purposes, and the topic was not well addressed at general meetings focused on laboratory animal science. At the time of the first APV Workshop in 1972, the US Animal Welfare Act¹ was a new piece of legislation that was focused on pet protection and did not provide much support for veterinarians working to improve the conditions of nonhuman primates being held for research purposes. Furthermore, in association with the increase in use of nonhuman primates in research in the late 1960s and early 1970s, new problems emerged that required solutions, including how best to house different species, how to form successful social groupings and breeding colonies, how to deal with outbreaks of new diseases, such as those caused by simian retroviruses, and what sorts of tests and diagnostic procedures should be done for newly imported animals. For example, at that time standardized procedures were not in place for administering or reading intradermal tuberculin tests in primates.

Thus the small group of veterinarians largely working in the newly formed NPRCs and in the pharmaceutical industry in the early 1970s recognized that although they could discuss specific issues with one another by telephone from time to time, if they knew whom to call, they had limited opportunities for sharing knowledge. The true advancement of primate medicine required a venue in which veterinarians could meet to speak collectively and freely on matters related to nonhuman primate management, disseminate information to each other on issues related to primate health and welfare, and promote fellowship and networking between primate veterinarians at different facilities.

The first APV Workshop was held in Bethesda, MD in the spring of 1973, with funding provided by the US National Institutes of Health. The NIH had invested significant funds

in the NPRCs and understood that the success of this venture required the support of veterinarians with specific expertise in primate care, management, and medicine. Approximately 20 participants gathered together for that first Workshop, which was an all-American and largely male-dominated event. They informally discussed clinical case management, as well as housing, handling, and nutritional issues, and all in attendance agreed that the event was beneficial and should be repeated. The Workshop also promoted greater consistency of practices between sites that held research primates. To share the burden for the Workshop costs, a decision was initially made to rotate the Workshop between primate center sites. With expanding attendance over the years, a registration fee became necessary and the locations expanded to more standard meeting venues. However, the hospitality and fellowship that were key underpinnings of the first meeting have remained significant features of every subsequent meeting.

The Workshop has continued as an annual event to the present day, and APV has expanded and changed with time to meet the needs of new members and the changing face of primate medicine. The increasing emphasis on the 3Rs in laboratory animal medicine and heightened public interest in research animal care and use over the past 40 years have augmented the need for competent and caring veterinarians in primate medicine. While discussion of clinical cases remains an important element of the Workshop, the program has been expanded to include regulatory updates, occupational health and safety issues, and topical seminars on current developments in primate science and medicine. Membership information collected for strategic planning purposes in a recent survey indicates that the demographics of the organization have changed significantly over the years. Over 56% of the current 470 APV members are now female, with 10% of members residing and working outside of the United States in over 12 countries around the world. While almost 60% of members identify themselves as having a primarily clinical role, and 32% work in an academic environment, almost 20% have little day to day contact with nonhuman primates. For these members, the APV Workshop is highly valued as a means of keeping up to date with current practices in primate medicine, management, and welfare.

In the past decade, the organization has expanded from having a primary focus on the annual Workshop to developing a primate formulary and guidelines and recommendations regarding research primate care and welfare. Available guidelines address humane endpoints, social housing, and food restriction, and another 6 are under development. APV has become more outward looking and sponsors educational seminars at several other meetings each year and the travel and participation costs to allow some early career primate veterinarians and those

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from developing countries to attend the annual Workshop. The organization is also developing as a resource for primate medicine, care, and welfare in areas of the world in which primate medicine may not be well developed.

While much has changed in the 40-year span of the organization, including technology for enhanced clinical care of animals, improved understanding of primate behavior, opportunities for electronic information sharing and social networking, and the entire field of genomics and proteomics, the key mission of APV has remained focused on advancing and promoting the science, medicine, management, and humane care of nonhuman primates. APV remains a strong and vibrant organization moving forward with the promise of many more excellent Workshops to come.

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge the comments and information provided by Drs Roy Hendrickson, Tom Butler, Dennis Johnsen, and David Martin regarding the organization of the first APV Workshop.

References

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