



Approval NEEDED

Fiona Rhodes, NZVJ Editor-in-Chief, and **Sarah Fowler**, NZVJ Scientific Editor, outline updated instructions for the journal's authors, and the important role of animal ethics committees.

THE NZVJ HAS recently updated its instructions for authors. One change is to the policy on animal welfare and ethics, which has been amended so that it aligns more closely with the *Guidelines on Animal Ethics and Welfare for Veterinary Journals* that were developed by the International Association of Veterinary Editors.

As previously, for a paper to be considered for publication, all

experimental work involving live animals must comply with relevant international, national and/or institutional guidelines and legal requirements.

In addition, authors must include a statement in the materials and methods section that all procedures involving the experimental use of animals were approved by an animal ethics committee (AEC) or equivalent, where relevant. If there is any doubt about whether AEC

approval is required, an AEC should be consulted. Therefore, for any paper submitted to the NZVJ that describes an experimental study using live animals, the study should have been conducted following consultation with an AEC and, where relevant, approval should have been obtained.

For scientists and veterinarians working within universities, or at research institutions such as AgResearch, AEC approval is routinely obtained during the planning process before commencing any studies involving animals. However, clinicians in practice may not be aware of the process involved or how to contact an AEC. Below we outline the role of AECs and how approval can be obtained.

Under section 6 of the Animal Welfare Amendment Act 2015, an AEC is required by any organisation, institution or company that wishes to conduct research, testing or teaching using animals. Such an organisation must have a code of ethical conduct (CEC) that has been approved by the director-general of MPI. The CEC contains the details of the policies of and procedures to be undertaken by the AEC. Requirements for the CEC, as well as the functions of an AEC, are stipulated in the Act. The AEC should consist of at least four members. These must include a senior representative of the organisation, a veterinarian nominated by the NZVA, a person nominated by a territorial authority/regional council and a lay person nominated by an approved animal welfare organisation.

The Animal Welfare Amendment Act provides a set of criteria that should be considered by AECs before giving approval for research proposals. The key principle underlying approval is whether the anticipated benefits of the research outweigh any harms that may occur to the animals involved. An important consideration is therefore whether the study is designed so that it is likely to meet the stated objectives – ie the study has been well designed. This also includes assessing whether the number

of animals to be used is the minimum needed to ensure that the results have statistical validity.

Members of the AEC must also consider whether the physical health and behavioural needs of the study subjects will be met. If the research could cause the animals pain or distress, they also need to consider what will be done to minimise or avoid this.

The overall principles that the AEC must consider are the '3Rs': reduce, refine and replace. In other words, animals should only be used when there are no alternatives, and any harms to animals must be weighed against the benefit to humans or other animals, and those harms must be minimised.

Therefore, when assessing an application, the objective of the AEC is to determine whether the use of animals in the proposed study is justified – ie that the scientific value of the results of the study outweighs the potential impacts on the animals. To do this, the AEC needs to know the rationale for the study, why the animals are required, what will be done to the animals and the impacts of this work on the welfare of the animals.

There are a number of resources available for those applying for AEC approval, which are listed at right. These include the Australian and New Zealand Council for the Care of Animals in Research and Teaching (ANZCCART), which works to promote the responsible

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Animal welfare section of the MPI website (www.mpi.govt.nz/protection-and-response/animal-welfare).
- Guide for the use of animals in research, testing and teaching (www.mpi.govt.nz/document-vault/3660).
- The Australian and New Zealand Council for the Care of Animals in Research and Teaching (<http://anzccart.org.nz/researchers>).
- 'Conducting and interpreting research in practice: how solid is your evidence?'. A presentation to the meeting of the Food Safety, Animal Welfare and Biosecurity Branch of the NZVA by Scott McDougall (www.sciquest.org.nz/node/72532).
- Writing and submitting your paper to the NZVJ (www.nzva.org.nz/?page=nzvjauth).

scientific use of animals. It provides advice to researchers on topics such as the relevant legislation, understanding ethics committees and assistance with study design.

So how do you find an AEC?

Veterinarians working in a research organisation or university can apply to their organisation's AEC. A veterinarian outside such an organisation needs to obtain a 'parenting arrangement' with an organisation that has a CEC (for example, AgResearch), so that they can apply to its AEC. This arrangement must be approved by the director-general of MPI. Negotiations are underway for the establishment of a parenting agreement between the NZVA and AgResearch that would allow veterinarians who do not already have parenting agreements access to an AEC at AgResearch.

For any veterinarian who is considering conducting a clinical study but has little experience, we suggest making contact with a knowledgeable person in the field of research, such as someone who has already published in the NZVJ. Members of the NZVJ Editorial Board are more than happy to provide guidance and advice. Collaborating with researchers at a university or Crown research institute may also increase the quality and value of the study by enabling access to scientific advice and technologies, and potentially additional funding. It may also facilitate access to an AEC. (vs)