

Report to Office of Extramural Research Acting Director on Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare (OLAW) Site Visits to Chimpanzee Facilities – July 2010

INTRODUCTION

This report summarizes the results of a series of site visits to institutions that receive funds from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for research and maintenance of chimpanzees. The objectives of the visits were to determine whether these institutions' programs and facilities for the care and use of chimpanzees were consistent with their Animal Welfare Assurance (Assurance) with OLAW and to evaluate the current state of social housing, husbandry, enrichment, veterinary care, and training practices for chimpanzees.

BACKGROUND

As a condition of receipt of Public Health Service support for research involving laboratory animals, institutions must provide a written Assurance to OLAW describing the means they will employ to comply with the Public Health Service Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals (PHS Policy). OLAW negotiates and approves these Assurances on behalf of the Director, NIH. Each Assurance is a detailed document tailored to the individual institution's needs, research practices, and procedures. It must be consistent with the PHS Policy. An Assurance approved by OLAW commits the institution and its personnel to full compliance with the PHS Policy, the applicable regulations (9 CFR, Subchapter A) issued by the United States Department of Agriculture under the Animal Welfare Act, and the *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals (Guide)*. Through the partnership established by the Assurance, the shared responsibility for the welfare of laboratory animals is discharged in accordance with Section 495 of the Public Health Service Act.

In March 2009, OLAW received from the Office of the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services a list of allegations made by the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) of potential noncompliance with the PHS Policy and the *Guide* at the University of Louisiana – Lafayette, New Iberia Research Center (NIRC). The allegations were accompanied by undercover video footage obtained by a HSUS informant who had worked at the facility for nine months. The same allegations were presented to the Secretary of Agriculture who directed Animal Care (AC) of the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to conduct inspections of registered research facilities housing chimpanzees and assess current housing, husbandry, and handling practices. In order to investigate the allegations made against NIRC and to conduct a cross sectional evaluation of all Assured institutions housing chimpanzees, OLAW began a year long series of site visits, many of them conducted in conjunction with the USDA inspections.

The following institutions were visited:

University of Louisiana – Lafayette, NIRC (Louisiana)
Bioqual, Inc. (Maryland)

University of Texas, MD Anderson Cancer Center (Texas)
Southwest Foundation for Biomedical Research (Texas)
Emory University/Yerkes National Primate Research Center (Georgia)
Georgia State University (Georgia)
Chimp Haven (Louisiana)
Great Ape Trust of Iowa (Iowa)
NIH/Alamogordo Primate Facility (New Mexico)

FINDINGS

Overall, the institutions housing chimpanzees were found to be in compliance with PHS Policy.

Social Housing and Enrichment of Chimpanzees

The chimpanzees were, with rare exception, socially housed. They had complex and stimulating environments, were provided with environmental enrichment in the form of manipulanda and food treats, and had positive interactions with the staff. In cases where an animal was singly housed due to study requirements or incompatibility with other animals, efforts were made to provide enrichment and return the animal to a partner as soon as feasible.

Training of Chimpanzees

Many institutions had successfully trained the chimpanzees to cooperate with requests from handlers such as moving between enclosures and allowing ready access for procedures such as obtaining body temperatures, blood, or other biological samples. In cases where animals were not trained or cooperating, institutions utilized a variety of handling methods for the conduct of procedures or administered anesthetics or tranquilizers including use of dart guns.

Husbandry and Veterinary Care of Chimpanzees

Without exception, the quality of care being provided was uniformly high and supported by dedicated and knowledgeable animal care teams with integrated animal behavior and enrichment professionals. The veterinary care included state of the art resources rivaling major human medical centers.

Social Housing of Other Nonhuman Primates

Many of the facilities visited also housed other nonhuman primates such as macaques and squirrel monkeys. Regarding these species, the numbers of animals being socially housed varied among facilities. In some institutions the majority of primates were housed with conspecifics whereas in others most animals were singly housed. Reasons given for single housing included lack of appropriate caging or study requirements limiting pair or group housing.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall the institutions were found to be in compliance with the PHS Policy and the quality of care and commitment to the psychological well-being of the chimpanzees and other nonhuman primates was high. The following issues were identified as requiring further enhancement:

- In situations where it is safe and feasible, chimpanzees and other nonhuman primates should be given positive reinforcement training to perform desired cooperative activities. This type of training may also aid in reducing stress from capture and restraint and the need for chemical darts.
- Housing of primates in social settings (pairs or groups) is the requirement of the USDA regulations and single housing is the exception. Greater effort must be made to co-house animals. Exemptions to the social housing requirement must be based on strong scientific justification approved by the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee or for a specific veterinary or behavioral reason. Lack of appropriate caging does not constitute an acceptable justification for exemption.

In order to assist these facilities and the larger community in enhancing the care and well-being of nonhuman primates in the research setting, the following actions have been planned and are being implemented:

1. OLAW in consultation with USDA Animal Welfare Information Center (AWIC) will provide online resources addressing positive reinforcement training practices for nonhuman primates.
2. OLAW and USDA Animal Care have addressed or will address the social housing issue in various forums. These include:
 - a joint workshop at the Public Responsibility in Medicine and Research (PRIMR) meeting in March 2010;
 - a training presentation with the added assistance of USDA AWIC to the USDA Veterinary Medical Officers in April 2010;
 - a joint webinar by OLAW, USDA Animal Care and AWIC recorded and available on the OLAW website in summer 2010;
 - expanded guidance on the OLAW website as Frequently Asked Questions; and
 - presentation of the issue at other professional meetings.

Through the educational efforts outlined above and proactive engagement by research institutions, nonhuman primates should be afforded enhanced social housing opportunities and positive reinforcement training resulting in improved animal welfare.