

Letters to the Editor

Debating vivisection within the curriculum

In your recent News article "Laboratories terminated, but lessons learned," concerning dog vivisection laboratories in physiology courses in veterinary schools (*JAVMA*, Mar 15, 2000, pp 815, 818–819), Dr. David Gross, professor and head of Veterinary Biosciences at the University of Illinois College of Veterinary Medicine, is quoted as saying that he "feels a definite move" among medical schools back to such laboratories. Dr. Gross' feelings are mistaken. In fact, most medical schools have abandoned dog vivisection in physiology courses, often under pressure from conscientiously objecting medical students, and the trend is for more schools to forgo such ethically questionable exercises. Here at the University of California, San Diego (where one of us [LAH] is an Associate Professor of Pathology and Neuroscience), the physiology department has been presented with a petition signed by over 150 physicians, including medical school faculty members and former department chairs, urging an end to such laboratories. When so many practicing physicians object to physiology dog vivisection as unnecessary in medical education, the contentions of physiology faculty such as Dr. Gross that dog killing laboratories are "needed" is unpersuasive. He touts the "intangibles" afforded by these laboratories, but at least in the context of

medical education, the many practicing physicians opposed to them constitute a convincing argument against their continuation.

*Lawrence A. Hansen, MD
San Diego, Calif*

*Nancy L. Harrison, MD
Chula Vista, Calif*

My letter is in reference to "Laboratories terminated, but lessons learned" *JAVMA*, (Mar 15, 2000, pp 815, 818–819).

Help me get this straight. Have I really lived so long that students, newspapers, and humaniacs are establishing curricula and teaching methods at colleges of veterinary medicine? Are veterinary degrees passed out to people who have only read about physiology? Is the first living thing some young person incises with a scalpel or punctures with a needle some client's valuable horse or precious pet? Are there any veterinarians on college faculties or administrations these days?

If students can choose to take or not take laboratory courses in physiology, surgery, or anatomy is there any reason for them to show up on campus? After all, they can read the lectures from a correspondence course. Many people have no desire to be veterinarians, and colleges of veterinary medicine should not feel obligated to confer professional degrees on students who do not choose to take the entire prescribed class load.

*R. Leland West, DVM, MS
Colorado Springs, Colo*

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