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EDITOR'S NOTE: Ned Buyukmihci is an associate professor of surgery at UC Davis.

By NED BUYUKMIHCI

The administration at UC Davis has made claims that it is sensitive to the issues surrounding the use of non-human animals in research and teaching.

They have even established the Alternatives to Animal Research Fund, which purportedly is to be used to develop alternatives to the harmful use of non-human animals in research and teaching. A program was recently established to aggressively seek money for this fund from various donors.

Recent events, however, suggest that these claims of concern and a willingness to work toward alternatives are disingenuous.

Last fall, a graduate student in toxicology refused, on ethical grounds, to kill a rabbit in order to learn material that could be gained from texts and other means.

After considerable harassment by the teachers involved, and no support by the UCD administration, he left the university rather than compromise his personal beliefs. This student had planned to use his education to study the use alternatives in toxicological research.

By virtually forcing him to leave, did the university show its commitment to finding alternatives to non-human animals in research and teaching?

Last winter, a third-year student in the School of Veterinary Medicine found it unethical for her to injure and kill a healthy dog in order to learn certain manual skills such as drawing blood.

She realized there was no need to kill an animal for this and offered to use her own dog for some of the procedures and a cadaver for others. Not only was she denied permission, but her concern for the lives of the animals was ridiculed. She was told she would fail the course if she did not do the procedures on a healthy dog that was going to be killed. She refused.

It took this student several months to finally resolve the situation.

Why was the university adminis-

tration so resistant in allowing this student to learn without killing a healthy animal?

For several years, I have taught a course in veterinary ophthalmology in which there is a surgical laboratory. In this laboratory, dogs from the pound are used in non-survival surgery to teach students basic surgical techniques involving the eye. I have never been pleased about the use of pound animals, but this was not a decision over which I had any control.

Nevertheless, for those students who had ethical concerns about doing unnecessary surgery on healthy animals and killing them afterward, I had offered the option of using cadavers of patients who were euthanized because of terminal illness.

This year, I even offered the possibility of using these patients, with the permission of the human guardians involved, under circumstances identical to those in which pound dogs would be used.

That is, under strict supervision by me, these dying patients would be deeply anesthetized so they could feel no pain. The students would perform the procedures and then painlessly put these hopelessly ill patients out of their

miser by an overdose of anesthetic. The difference between this situation and that of using healthy dogs from the pound should be obvious.

As an accomplished teacher and board-certified ophthalmologist, it was my professional judgment that the use of a cadaver would suffice for these students. In response to criticism, however, I modified my proposal to allow for live animal use, as described above.

The administration nevertheless has been vigorously opposed to my offering an alternative. They finally solved the problem by firing me from the course a few weeks ago; the reason for this was clearly and unequivocally because of the issue of offering alternatives to the students.

Moreover, it was done less than three weeks before the course was scheduled to begin this winter, giving the new instructor no time to prepare. The administration was so inexorably determined that students not be offered a choice that they were willing to severely inconvenience several faculty members and potentially compromise the quality of the students' education.

Is this the action of an administration sincere in its concern for non-human animals or in the quest for alternatives to their use in research and teaching?

This year, California Assemblywoman Jackie Speier, D-South San Francisco, authored AB 2507, a bill that would have allowed concerned students (kindergarten through professional school) to utilize alternatives to the harmful or fatal use of animals in their education. Whether a satisfactory alternative was available was left strictly up to the discretion of the teacher.

UCD strongly opposed the bill and played a major part in writing weakening amendments into its language. Since the instructor had final control of whether an alternative was feasible or appropriate, what could have been the fear of the university administration? The only logical answer is that they are insincere in their pronouncements about alternatives.

Apple Computer produced a commercial in which a high school

student indicated that she preferred using a computer program to learn the anatomy of a frog rather than killing the creature.

In response to this advertisement, the California Biomedical Research Association, of which UCD is a prominent member, put out an alert in October of 1987 to members and interested parties.

They said: "Your letters are urgently needed right away ... ask that (the ad) be taken off TV immediately. Write now and circulate (this request) to others."

They are threatened by a high school student employing alternatives to dissection! As an active participant in the research association, UCD shares responsibility for this unintelligible reaction.

The events I have summarized clearly demonstrate that the administration's pronouncements professing their concern for the use of non-human animals and the Alternatives to Animal Research Fund are a sham.

These events reveal that the UCD administration has to date had no sincere interest in pursuing alternatives, except as it may improve their public image.

The events even suggest that UCD is unwilling to honor basic human rights. Reactions such as

those to the student rights bill and to the Apple Computer commercial strike me as hysterical attempts to stifle all thoughts and ideas contrary to those held by the majority.

There has even been serious discussion at faculty meetings on how to structure admission procedures to keep students with an animal rights philosophy from entering the veterinary medical school.

There is a very disturbing message that the UCD administration seems to be sending: Students having serious and sincere concerns about non-human animals should not come to UCD unless they are willing to compromise their personal ethics.

This is particularly disconcerting in the area of veterinary medicine since a major goal of veterinary medical training is to reduce non-human animal suffering.

The hypocrisy is that the administration demands the student to harm and kill healthy animals in the process. Students who prefer not to do so would be described by many as possessing the very best of attributes for this profession. They are not being afforded the opportunity to exercise their right of conscience at UCD. Imagine if this was the manner in which we

trained physicians to tend to ill humans.

We have a new chancellor at UCD, Theodore L. Hullar. With this change in administration, it is my sincere hope that UCD will begin to shed its regressive reactionary stance to the issues surrounding the use of non-human animals in research and teaching.

Taxpayers can use their influence to urge the UCD administration to begin working with responsible people on this problem.

Public accountability is needed. Students must be afforded the opportunity to achieve their educational goals in a manner that is consistent with their personal ethics.

Whether they avail themselves of the opportunity is moot; they must be offered a choice. They must not be forced to accept the status quo.

Write to Chancellor Hullar and Vice Chancellor Larry Vanderhoef (UCD, Mrak Hall, Davis, CA 95616), urging them to take steps to provide a learning environment that is truly sensitive to the needs of the students and the non-human animals used in research and teaching.

This is a matter of utmost importance to students, faculty and the non-human animals.