Collaborative Approach to Enhance IACUC Member Training Through an Annual Educational Retreat

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Problem statement:
IACUC members and the Institutional Official share the responsibility of ensuring that institutions using animals in research, teaching, and/or testing oversee and evaluate their programs and facilities as required by federal laws and regulations. The institution is responsible for the training of its IACUC members. Many institutions have programs to orient and train their IACUC members; however, these programs focus on laws, regulations, and the review process. IACUC administrators provide these programs to new members in a live or online platform or at regular IACUC meetings, but these avenues do not provide sufficient time for collaborative aspects of IACUC member education/learning. The IACUC members tasked with protocol and program review seldom have the experience or time for in-depth discussions to understand and decipher the details of complex programmatic requirements for maintaining a quality animal care and use program. Furthermore, simply providing an extensive list of resources, handouts, and/or reading the regulatory requirements do not effectively prepare members to fulfill their charge when dealing with complex issues. The size and nature of institutional research programs varies significantly and accounts for the corresponding variation in the scope and depth of instructional programs and the frequency at which they are offered to IACUC members. Our University’s IACUC Program intended to enhance our member educational initiatives and incorporate methods to approach complex programmatic responsibilities via an IACUC member retreat. Additionally, this approach was intended to enhance the knowledge of IACUC members and to keep members abreast of changes to animal care and welfare programmatic rules, regulations, policy positions, and Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare guidance. Presentations were developed to assist with the application of these items while keeping in line with the culture of the University. Furthermore, this approach involved an opportunity for stakeholders from other University departments, IACUC members, and representatives from other state institutions to network and learn from one another.

Description of research:
The University’s IACUC Program provides administrative support to the IACUC, which includes the responsibility for enhancing training initiatives for committee members. A half day IACUC retreat was planned with the following goals: a) understanding of the needs of IACUC members; b) through conversations with local IACUC members and other institutional IACUC members/administrators, to collaboratively assess and effectively apply the regulations and institutional IACUC-specific standing operating procedures to program responsibilities; and c) to develop and open lines of communication between the various institutional departments such as Comparative Medicine, Media Relations, General Counsel, and Campus Police. It was our hope that this collaborative approach to multi-faceted programmatic responsibilities in an academic institution would enhance the use of animals in research, teaching, and/or testing. The IACUC member retreat provided a forum for an inter-institutional collaborative approach to understanding the responsibilities of ensuring a comprehensive and compliant IACUC Program. This collaborative approach is a very effective training strategy and provided a forum for exchange of information, expressing concerns, discussing potential and actual issues, and the creation of realistic responses to various scenarios. It enhanced the understanding of these issues by IACUC members and vested stakeholders. Participants learned how to apply the information obtained, which will eventually improve the quality of the animal care program at the academic institution. The retreat provided a forum for obtaining ideas on best practice for ongoing open communication/guidance for IACUC members, chairperson, vice chairperson, veterinarians, and IACUC administrators to respond to specific questions and provide clarification of issues as they arise. This poster will provide information on the journey of these programmatic initiatives, its achievements, challenges, and progress made to enhance education.