Stepping Into The Future: How To Create A Fully Electronic IACUC Office

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As institutions strive to become more eco-friendly, they face the challenge of transitioning the IACUC office to be fully electronic. Many institutions, including Northwestern University (NU), have spent time, money and resources to find ways to integrate a paperless animal care program. Electronic processes have been introduced over time in an effort to transition and support approximately 850 protocols, inspect 14 buildings across three campus locations and conduct and document compliance oversight.

The IACUC Office at Northwestern University has implemented electronic ways of tracking our Animal Study Protocols, semi-annual inspections, medical records and Post Approval Monitoring (PAM) process. The most recently implemented protocol process allows a PI to make an amendment to a procedure or substance and have the option to apply it to just one protocol or all protocols, thus saving the PI time and also improving protocol consistency. Additionally, the electronic information is accessible and can be used as a resource for the compliance arm of IACUC.

Protocol Process
- The protocol is created and managed electronically by the PI.
- Technical support can be provided by a trainer remotely or in person.
- The flow chart and email notifications streamline communication and allows feedback during the process.
- Edits and comments are tracked through the system, eliminating duplication.
- The substance and procedure libraries ensure consistency across protocols and remains available to the PI for future protocol submissions.
- The investigator or designee can submit a request to make changes to this information at any time.

Inspection Process
- Inspection teams are selected, assigned and scheduled using a complete list of IACUC committee members.
- The module indicates if the IACUC team member has any professional conflict of interest, expired TB test, or allergies.
- Teams are provided a tablet for note taking.

Medical Records Process
- The subcommittee consists of IACUC members, veterinary and IACUC staff who meet to review USDA medical records.
- Findings and inquiries are compared to the protocol and compiled electronically then presented to the IACUC for recommendations on corrective action if necessary.
- A final report is provided to the principal investigator along with recommendations for correction, retraining and future prevention.

Conclusion
The Northwestern University IACUC’s use of electronic systems has allowed our institution to be eco-friendly while allowing information to be shared or tracked between systems. Utilizing in-house developed and vendor electronic systems has allowed NU to track findings, prepare metrics and monitor compliance data. Additionally, implementation of the electronic systems reduces the burden on PIs through the convenience of the libraries and allows the institution to manage protocols, inspections, medical records and PAM processes for multiple campus locations.