



POLICY

TITLE:	Authority of the Attending Veterinarian & Animal Care Staff
Policy Number:	2014-044
Responsible Department:	Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee
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Revised:	10/11/17 (wordsmithing); 9/13/18 (Added delegated authority of animal care staff); 6/10/2020 (Added additional circumstance that may warrant necropsy)

Purpose of Policy: Establishes the authority of Western University of Health Sciences (WesternU) Attending Veterinarians (AV) to conduct or prescribe treatments, including euthanasia, perform unscheduled necropsies on animals and interrupt or suspend animal procedures when the welfare of the animals used in teaching or research is at risk.

Policy Information: Pursuant to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal Welfare Regulation [9 CFR 2.33](#), “each research facility shall assure that the attending veterinarian has appropriate authority to ensure the provision of adequate veterinary care and to oversee the adequacy of other aspects of animal care and use”. The [Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals](#) (the *Guide*) states that “the institution must provide the AV with sufficient authority, including access to all animals” and “resources to manage the program of veterinary care”. According to USDA [Policy No. 4](#), “at the discretion of the attending veterinarian, regulated facilities should perform necropsies as part of providing adequate veterinary care” and, according to the American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine (ACLAM) [position statement](#), “The veterinarian must have authority to use appropriate treatment or control measures, including euthanasia if indicated, following diagnosis of an animal disease or injury. If possible, the veterinarian should discuss the situation with the principal investigator to determine a course of action consistent with experimental goals. However, if the principal investigator is not available, or if agreement cannot be reached, the veterinarian must have authority to act to protect the health and well-being of the institutional animal colony. The veterinarian's authority should be exercised with the concurrence of the IACUC and the Institutional Official”. A similar [policy statement](#) has been published by the Association for the Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care International.

Policy: The Attending Veterinarian (AV) or Back-up Veterinarian shall have unrestricted access to all areas where research animals are used or housed, including the vivaria, research laboratories and research study areas. The AV or Back-up Veterinarian has full authority to treat or humanely

euthanize research animals at his or her discretion, ideally in consultation with the Principal Investigator (PI) or a responsible member of the research team. If the PI and veterinary staff cannot reach consensus on treatment, the veterinarian shall have the authority to treat the animal, remove it from the experiment, institute appropriate measures to relieve severe pain or distress, or perform euthanasia if necessary. The veterinarian is not required to seek approval from the PI or any other party, including the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), to treat or euthanize research animals for humane reasons if such actions are judged prudent by the veterinarian for the welfare of the animal. The veterinarian may also:

- Override or stop a procedure if an animal does not respond to experimental manipulations as expected or as described in the IACUC-approved protocol.
- Intervene if animals develop spontaneous or unexpected adverse conditions due to an IACUC-approved experimental manipulation.

Necropsy: As stated above, “at the discretion of the attending veterinarian, regulated facilities should perform necropsies as part of providing adequate veterinary care”. The AV or Back-up Veterinarian has the authority to perform a necropsy on any animal used in teaching or research at any WesternU owned or operated facility when, in their professional judgment, a necropsy is warranted to diagnose injury or disease in an animal or to protect the overall health of an animal colony or the health of personnel exposed to animals used in teaching or research. If possible, the veterinarian will discuss the situation with the principal investigator prior to euthanasia of an animal to determine the best course of action that is consistent with the research goals. However, the ultimate decision on the course of action will rest with the veterinarian. Circumstances which may warrant a necropsy include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The facility is undergoing a high death loss.
- There are a significant number of unexplained deaths at the facility.
- There exists a reasonable possibility that an undiagnosed infectious disease is present at the facility (with or without potential zoonoses).
- Circumstances around a death indicate a violation of the Animal Welfare Act may have contributed to the situation.
- Circumstances which may indicate a situation posing a serious risk to the health of other animals within the vivarium.

Delegated Authority: In emergent or rapidly evolving situations when expedited treatment is in the humane interest of an animal, a decision must be reached within a short time frame. In the event the AV cannot be reached immediately for consultation, the AV has empowered the animal care staff to initiate treatment of only mice and rats with routine health conditions provided that such conditions and treatments are explicitly described in IACUC-approved standard operating procedures (SOPs). The AV may also delegate authority to animal care staff to euthanize an animal when seriously ill or injured provided that the AV cannot be reached immediately for consultation. The animal care staff are not required to seek approval from the PI or any other party, including the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), to initiate treatment or euthanize research animals for humane reasons according to the authority invested in them above if such actions are judged prudent for the welfare of the animal. However, the animal care staff must simultaneously notify the PI and the AV of any such actions.