

Institute of Animal Technology (IAT)

LET'S TALK EUTHANASIA



It's OK ... NOT TO BE OKAY ...

Let's Talk Euthanasia



Euthanasia is a Greek term literally meaning 'a good death'. In this context, its objectives are met when death is induced which causes no pain or distress to an animal.

As an Animal Technologist undertaking euthanasia is usually the result of a scientific programme of work finishing, or to alleviate, any unnecessary pain and suffering to protected animals.

Euthanising animals is an accepted undertaking of an Animal Tech's job and the emotional impact should not be underestimated.

In carrying out their daily duties, Animal Techs may find some comfort from the fact that the animals they are euthanising have a justifiable purpose and meaning, by contributing to research and development. In exceptional circumstances, that purpose can be compromised in many contexts.

What about the wellbeing of Animal Technicians when animals are being euthanised due to unfortunate circumstances, where animals are euthanised before any meaningful results can be obtained?

Although it may be difficult to understand the decisions taken, you should trust that your institutional management and/or AWERB will have considered the hugely complex ethical, moral and legal impact, alongside the chances of maintaining the highest standards of animal care to the conclusion of a study.

You should take pride in the fact that those animals will have received your respect and been valued for their contribution, before humanely euthanasing them.

The IAT hopes to support all our members, by recognising and understanding that this can sometimes be an emotional job due to the bonds formed between animal and technician. It is natural to have these emotions and sometimes feel sad but please do not bottle these feelings up - share them. Talk to someone about your thoughts and emotions, ask colleagues if they would like to talk about their thoughts also, maybe start an informal support group in your team.

In 2003 Davies, K., conducted a study investigating emotions of Animal Technologists focussing on the emotional link between animals and staff. He described how:

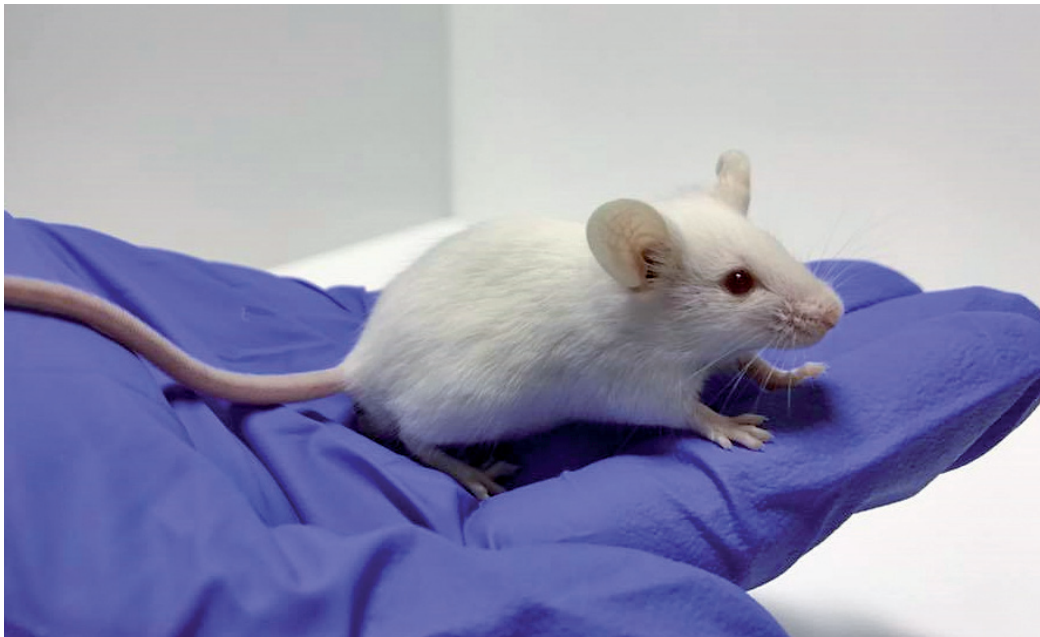
"Animal Technologists are exposed to a great number of conflicting, almost contradictory emotional situations, often on a daily basis. Staff are required to create animals, via intensive breeding programmes, maintain them as healthy as possible which is essential for the validity of the experimental results, watch them being experimented upon (in some cases conduct the experimental procedures themselves) and finally euthanase them in a professional manner."

Further research conducted in the UK by Davies, K, focussed specifically on emotional exhaustion and dissonance in Animal Technicians and how tasks such as euthanasia impacts emotional well being.

Considerations to support Animal Technicians when facing euthanasia?

Here are a few suggestions to manage this time:

- Ask the person who normally cared for these animals if they would like to perform the euthanasia or if possible they would prefer another member of the team to carry this out.
- Support technicians by recognising that you know how much they care and you appreciate that euthanasia is being carried by a competent, caring individual and it will be administered with professionalism and compassion.
- Always check in on the technician carrying out the euthanasia at regular intervals, to ask about their wellbeing; they may be spending a lot of time euthanising animals they have looked after, loved and cared for.
- Let the technician know that you appreciate it is a very difficult time and you will support them and they are not alone. Do not overestimate the power of empathy at this time.
- Share the euthanasia amongst different technicians if at all possible to reduce the emotional burden of euthanasia.
- Set up an empty room for mindfulness or meditation, a quiet area to reflect.
- Ask your team if they would like to have a 'memorial' area, where they can acknowledge the sacrifice of the animals, and also express sadness and grief.
- Make sure they know expressing grief is OK, not only is it OK it's natural to feel sad.
- Local institutions may have counselling available for support.



In line with the UK findings, Canada and USA have carried out extensive research on what they term “Compassion fatigue”, and CALAS/ASCAL reference some useful material.

Compassion Fatigue in the Animal-Care Community by Charles R Figley PhD and Robert G Roop

- <https://animalstudiesrepository.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1004&context=ebooks>
- <http://hillsnorthamerica.com/the-cost-of-caring-compassion-fatigue-and-veterinary-technicians/>
- <https://www.labroots.com/webinar/compassion-fatigue-education-engagement-animal-research>

Support may also be found at:

Mind.org.uk, nhs/mental health advice among other charities and counselling services; please do not feel alone during times of uncertainty, stress and unpredictability.

This has been supplemented with information supplied by the Canadian Association for Laboratory Animal Science (CALAS).

