

# Veterinary Students In Pursuit of Ethical -

Kari Pohost, a second-year student at the University of Florida, College of Veterinary Medicine, discusses the difficulties of obtaining an ethical-source cadaver for her freshman anatomy coursework and her ultimate success. She reflects upon the impact of her experience and plans for the future of her education.



*Kari Pohost and her dog Buffy. Buffy was adopted from the University of Florida, College of Veterinary Medicine, after being used for research in a nutrition study.*

Before entering veterinary school, I planned on accepting the "necessary evil" of killing animals for the required anatomy courses and other veterinary school training. I remember justifying this position to myself by arguing that, no matter what I had to do to get through veterinary school, I would ultimately be a veterinarian and would, therefore, save many more animals than I would kill in school. It was only after my first few months of working on cadavers of once-healthy dogs that I started questioning this reasoning. I began reading articles in the *Alternatives in Veterinary Medical Education* newsletter and talking with

students from other veterinary colleges. I soon realized that alternatives to killing animals existed. I remember reading an article about Andrew Knight, a veterinary student in Australia, who spoke out about the animal abuses occurring at his veterinary school. I thought he was really brave. I wished someone like him were in my class so that I would not have to be the only one to speak up.

When I realized that the required large animal anatomy class was only two months away, I felt I must immediately address the need to acquire an ethical-source cadaver for this course. The instructor informed me that the cadavers

# Making a Difference

## Source Cadavers

were from ponies purchased from a farmer who bred them for meat. It seemed logical to me that, if human medical students are able to learn about anatomy and surgery without killing humans, veterinary medical students could learn without killing nonhuman animals. Ultimately, I realized that nothing was going to change unless I did something about it — I would have to be the one to speak up.

I started my "journey" by contacting the AVAR to find out more about alternatives to harmful animal use in veterinary schools. AVAR's Science Director Dr. Susan Krebsbach advised me to talk with the administration about the possibility of obtaining a cadaver from a client-donated animal who had died of natural causes or was euthanized for medical reasons. I then contacted the Dean of Students to inform him that I found the killing of animals for the sake of my education to be in conflict with my ethical beliefs. He subsequently set up a meeting with a committee of clinicians and researchers to discuss the curriculum requirement and possible ways of addressing my concerns.

In preparation for the meeting, I brought several copies of an article from the *Alternatives* newsletter that discussed a program at Tufts University, School of Veterinary Medicine, where client-donated, rather than purpose-bred, animals are used in the anatomy courses. The article pointed out some of the advantages of using client-donated animals, including introducing pathology into the first-year curriculum and encouraging students to work together to compare normal and abnormal anatomy. I also brought a prepared speech to the meeting, thanks to the advice of Dr. Krebsbach. Unfortunately, neither the article nor the speech had much of an

impact on the committee. Instead of considering my suggested alternative of using a cadaver obtained through a willed body donation program, the committee concluded that within 72 hours I would have to decide whether to leave school or choose between three of their alternatives: 1) I could agree to take the anatomy course in February using a cadaver from a purpose-bred animal; 2) I could leave for a year and wait to see if the program would change; or 3) I could transfer to another veterinary college where my ethical concerns would be respected.

After leaving the meeting, I felt desperate and confused. I knew I was running short on time. It seemed that my worst nightmare was coming true. I did not want to leave veterinary school, but how could I be responsible for an animal being intentionally killed for my education — especially when suitable alternatives were available. I immediately called my brother who helped calm me down. We started contacting animal protection organizations to ask for suggestions. Daniel Kossow from The Humane Society of the United States posted my story on-line. This, in turn, prompted individuals like University of Illinois student Linnaea Stull and organizations like the New England Anti-Vivisection Society to write letters in support of my request for an alternative. My brother and I also contacted state congressional leaders and an attorney recommended by the Animal Legal Defense Fund who agreed to write a letter urging the administration to find an alternative. Peter Wood from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals contacted me and was willing to lend support, as well. I should mention that I had no previous affiliation with any of these animal

organizations but, when I sought their assistance, they were very willing and able to provide an enormous amount of support in a short period of time. Finally, I read through the veterinary school student handbook, which stated that, if the college made a decision about my education that I did not agree with, the decision could be appealed to the university's Vice President of Health Science Student Affairs. So, I wrote a letter asking for an appeal for the decision in my case.

Thanks to everyone who lent their support and to the willingness of the administration to repeal their initial decision, I was in the office of the Dean of Students one day after the deadline had passed talking about the availability of a client-donated horse cadaver for the large animal anatomy class. The horse had been euthanized for medical reasons.

A year has passed since all this transpired. I am now less afraid to speak up for what I believe and am actively pursuing the implementation of other alternatives to harmful animal use at my school. Currently, I am working with the administration to use alternatives in surgical training that do not depend on harming or killing healthy animals. I am also working with other veterinary students to get a willed body donation program up and running at the University of Florida. With the support of other students, it is hoped that the clinicians and the administration will be convinced of the need to adopt such a program for the entire student body.