

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION IN THE HEALING PROFESSIONS:

A READER'S GUIDE TO THE ETHICAL AND SOCIAL ISSUES

Use of Animals in Medical Education

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The common objections to the use of animals in medical education pertain to concerns of mishandling of the animals before they arrive in classrooms, the welfare of the animals during use in training, and potential conflicts with and impact on student values and attitudes towards life. Nonetheless, objections toward the use of animals in *medical* education is not often discussed in the literature. There have been cases, however, of students dropping out of courses, or action being taken against them by the school for refusing to complete work which requires the use of animals. Legal action has been sought in some of these cases. Although the use of animals in medical training in the U.S. seems to be declining, conscientious objection can still be an issue, especially in veterinary schools.

There are several alternatives to the use of animals that can be and have been used for medical training. Knight lists computer simulations, videos, plasticized specimens, ethically-sourced cadavers (obtained from animals that have died naturally, in accidents, or have been euthanized for medical reasons), models, diagrams, self-experimentation and supervised clinical experiences.¹ Studies have affirmed the competency of students who are trained using these humane alternatives. Others, however, have argued that in some cases (such as in teaching tissue handling and surgical skills) the use of animals is a necessity.

Selected Reading:

Jonathan Balcombe.² The use of animals in higher education: problems, alternatives & recommendations. Washington, DC: Humane Society Press; 2000. Available from: http://www.humanesociety.org/assets/pdfs/parents_educators/the_use_of_animals_in_higher_ed.pdf

This book addresses conscientious objection by students and teachers in high schools and colleges. It offers a brief history on the use of animals in education, and discusses the quality and relevance of science education, concluding that student exercises should not

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be performed at the expense of the animal lives. Use of animals in medical education also raises sociological issues pertaining to student feelings and attitudes, and teacher influence. It contains empirical data on attitudes towards animal use, comparisons on performance of alternative methods to medical education. It also has data on live animal use by schools and a table highlighting student-choice dissection laws in the United States. While discouraging the use of live animals in medical education, the book recommends putting in place a legally mandated right to use humane alternatives since less than one in five States have dissection choice laws. The book asserts that dissection choice laws should apply to all levels of education not just pre-college. The book also contends that Institutional Animal Care and Use Committees (IACUCs) should impose more stringent protections on the use of animals in research.

Laura Jane Bishop and Anita Lonnes Nolen.³ *Animals in research and education: ethical issues.* Scope Note 40. National Reference Center for Bioethics Literature; 2001.
<http://hdl.handle.net/10822/556897>

In this annotated bibliography, the authors review the literature on the use of animals in research and education prior to 2001. Although the main focus of the bibliography pertains to animals in experiments, many of the items address issues of importance in education as well. While a short section is devoted to issues in animal use for education, conscientious objections and conflicts are not discussed.

Andrew Knight, ed.¹ *Learning without killing: a guide to conscientious objection.* 2002.
Available from: <http://hdl.handle.net/1805/3771>

This is a guide for students who may wish to make conscientious objections to the use of animals in education (especially in veterinary schools). The authors hold that animal lives should be saved and that humane alternatives should be found for educational use. The book includes several articles on non-violence in surgical training, the use of pound dogs in veterinary surgical training and educational memorial programs (EMP)--programs encouraging clients to donate the remains of their animals for veterinary education—as of 2002, only four of these programs were in place at U.S. Veterinary schools.

Knight also provides steps to follow when conscientiously objecting, ranging from choosing the right course, formally requesting alternatives, letter writing, appeals and petitions, legal action, media coverage and hunger strikes. The book includes 15 stories from students who have succeeded in their conscientious objection claims from Australia, Brazil, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, USA and Wales. The guide gives examples of emails and letters that may be used by students, and contains a humane education email list and contact information for groups and organizations in U.S.A., New Zealand, Japan, Europe, Canada, Brazil, Australia and the International Network for Humane Education (InterNICHE). Lastly, it includes a list of resources and databases on alternatives.

Marcia Goodman Kramer.⁴ *Humane education, dissection, and the law.* *Animal L.* 2006 2007;13:281. Available from: http://vwwv.animallaw.info/journals/jo_pdf/lralvol13_2_281.pdf

This article reviews U.S. law and litigation on the use of animals in education. By focusing on vivisection and dissection, the author provides an overview of student-choice laws. Kramer is in favor of additional protections for students: "no student should be barred from a career in the sciences because he or she is too humane to pass a course that requires dissection."

Further Reading

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