

CCAC ASSESSMENT PANEL MEMBER - A CRUCIAL ROLE

What is the purpose of the Assessment Program of the Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC)?

The purpose of the CCAC Assessment Program is to oversee, through peer review, the care and use of animals for experimental purposes in Canada. Institutions using animals (vertebrates and octopuses/squid) for research, teaching or testing are regularly evaluated by the CCAC through assessment panels, normally every three years (for complete details on the Assessment Program, please see the *CCAC policy statement on: the Assessment Program (revised October 1999)*).

What is the composition of assessment panels?

Assessment panels are composed of:

- an Assessment Director, employed by the CCAC to organize assessment visits and work to ensure consistency between panels; Assessment Directors assist other panel members in undertaking their duties, in clarifying issues and in formulating recommendations;
- a panel Chair, who is generally a scientist with a background in one of the life sciences; the Chair leads discussions and works towards achieving consensus among the panel members;
- a veterinarian, who generally has expertise in experimental animal medicine;
- a community representative, generally chosen from the community of the institution to be visited, in order to provide a local public perspective on the panel;
- other scientists, in the case of larger institutions.

How are panel members chosen?

The scientific members of the panel are nominated by the Assessment Director who will be doing the visit. Scientific panel members are selected with reference to the nature of the research, teaching or testing at the institution to be assessed.

The community representative is nominated by the Assessment Director and is often drawn from an SPCA/humane society in the local area of the institution to be visited or from the pool of community representatives on local Animal Care Committees (other than the committee(s) of the institution to be visited).

All panel members, except for the employees of the CCAC, serve voluntarily and without remuneration, except expenses.

What is the role of an assessment panel?

The role of an assessment panel is to review all aspects of the care and use of animals in research, teaching and testing within an institution, to assess the procedures and facilities for animal care and use, and to note and comment on any matters that may not be in accord with the CCAC's guidelines and policies. The panel reports its observations and recommendations to the CCAC Assessment Committee (for complete details on the role and responsibilities of assessment panels, please see the *CCAC policy statement on: assessment panel (revised March 1999)*).

Can information related to assessments be discussed/divulged publicly?

No, all assessment information is private and not to be discussed by or distributed to anyone other than the members of the assessment panel, the Assessment Committee and the members of the Assessment Sector in the CCAC Secretariat. All assessment information must be treated as confidential in order to encourage frank and open discussions of all animal care and use issues by assessment panel members and institutional representatives. An institution may choose to make its assessment report(s) public, but must first advise CCAC in writing if it plans to do so.

What is the CCAC Assessment Committee?

The Assessment Committee is a standing committee of the CCAC's Council (its governing body). It is composed of at least four Council representatives, including one person representing the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies. The Chair of Council, Vice-Chair of Council, Executive Director and Assessment Directors serve as *ex officio* members. The committee is responsible for providing an additional level of consistency and quality control in the Assessment Program by reviewing assessment reports and institutional responses to these reports. It also works towards improvements in the Assessment Program through new or revised CCAC policies.

Do assessment panels act as independent units in assessing institutions?

No, assessment panels are an integral part of the CCAC Assessment Program. An assessment panel visiting an institution represents the CCAC as a whole, and all preliminary reports produced by assessment panels are finalized and approved by the CCAC through its Assessment Committee.

Are individual panel members directly responsible for the assessments they carry out?

Assessment panel members are responsible for carrying out their individual duties appropriately during the assessment visit. Once the assessment panel has completed its preliminary report, it becomes the responsibility of the CCAC as a whole, and of the Assessment Committee in particular, to finalize and forward a complete assessment report to the institution. Only the names of CCAC employees who participated in the visit appear in the final report. All questions or comments related to the assessment should be addressed to the CCAC Secretariat. Once the assessment visit has been completed, individual panel members should not respond to questions regarding the assessment, whether from the institution or from anyone else.

What is the broad mandate of assessment panel members?

Panel members must act as unbiased, informed advisors to the institution, not as inspectors. They should be prepared to listen carefully during discussions and to be temperate and judicious in their comments. They should promote implementation of the high standards of animal care and use, which have been defined by peers in CCAC guidelines and policies.

Panel members must be respectful and collegial in their discussions with fellow panel members and with members of the institution being assessed. They should be calm and quiet when near animals and respect any institutional procedures/concerns regarding entry into animal rooms.

Are the duties of panel members limited to attending the assessment visit itself?

No, panel members must:

- 1 - prepare for the assessment by becoming familiar with the CCAC's guidelines and policies and by reading the pre-assessment documentation provided by the institution and by the CCAC, including the report from the previous assessment visit and the institutional response to any CCAC recommendations. Panel members should also read and become familiar with the Assessment Report Matrix, which is a template listing the items to be addressed during the visit and which is to be used to prepare the assessment report;
- 2 - be available for a pre-assessment meeting with the other panel members, either the evening before or the morning of the visit;
- 3 - read the draft assessment report as forwarded by the Scientific Writer, normally within 8 weeks of the visit, and provide comments/approval of the draft;
- 4 - read the institutional response (implementation report) to any CCAC recommendations when it is received (normally 3-6 months after the receipt by the institution of the assessment report, depending on the nature of the recommendations) and provide comments/approval of the response.

What principles are CCAC assessments based on?

Assessments are based on standards set forth in the following documents:

- the *CCAC policy statement on: terms of reference for animal care committees*;
- the *CCAC Guide to the Care and Use of Experimental Animals*, Vol. 1 (2nd Edn, 1993) and Vol. 2 (1984);
- the *CCAC guidelines on*:
 - *animal use protocol review* (1997);
 - *transgenic animals* (1997);
 - *choosing an appropriate endpoint in experiments using animals for research, teaching and testing* (1998);
 - *institutional animal user training* (1999);
 - *laboratory animal facilities – characteristics, design and development* (2003);
 - *the care and use of wildlife* (2003);
 - *the care and use of fish in research, teaching and testing* (2005);
- the *CALAM/ACMAL Standards of Veterinary Care* of the Canadian Association for Laboratory Animal Medicine (2004);
- the *2000 Report of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) Panel on Euthanasia*;
- the *Livestock Codes of Practice* of the Canadian Agri-Food Research Council;
- the *Laboratory Biosafety Guidelines* of Health Canada (2nd Edn, 1996);
- any relevant additional guidelines or policies which have been approved by Council and distributed to CCAC constituents.

Assessments are carried out as detailed in the *CCAC policy statement on: assessment panel* and follow the elements listed in the Assessment Report Matrix.

Where can these documents be found and what resources are available to help assessment panel members prepare for assessments?

Prior to an assessment visit, panel members are sent the policies and guidelines of the CCAC. These, along with many other resources, are available on the CCAC website (<http://www.ccac.ca>).

For further information or clarifications on CCAC policies and guidelines or on the assessment process itself, panel members should not hesitate to contact the Manager of Assessment Communications, Ms Jumoke Fasoyinu (tel.: 613-238-4031, ext. 33, email: jfasoyinu@ccac.ca).

What are the specific tasks of panel members during the assessment visit?

The specific tasks are detailed in the *CCAC policy statement on: assessment panel*. The main tasks are:

- 1 - to meet with institutional representatives during the ***Initial Meeting*** in order to discuss:
 - the use of animals by the institution and any significant changes that have been made to the institutional animal care and use program since the previous assessment;
 - any concerns that remain from the previous assessment;
 - the functioning of the institutional Animal Care Committee(s) (based on the *CCAC policy statement on: terms of reference for animal care committees*);
 - the programs for animal care and veterinary oversight;
 - the programs for the training as well as for the safety of animal care and use personnel.

- 2 - to conduct a ***Site Visit*** of the animal care and use facilities, including discussions with animal care and use personnel, while being particularly attentive to:
 - maintenance and sanitation of animal facilities;
 - animal care and facility management practices - standard operating procedures for animal care and use;
 - apparent physical condition of the animals;
 - veterinary care program;

- security of the facilities and safety of the personnel;
- 3 - to meet with fellow panel members *in camera* following the site visit to discuss concerns and commendations noted during the visit and to finalize the verbal presentation of recommendations to the institutional representatives. Recommendations are categorized according to the *CCAC policy statement on: definitions of recommendations made in CCAC reports* (1996).
- 4 - to meet with institutional representatives during the ***Final Meeting***, to provide a summary of concerns and to provide preliminary recommendations and commendations. These may be modified according to CCAC guidelines and policies when the assessment report is reviewed and finalized.

What can panel members expect to find during site visits of animal facilities?

In general terms, there are four different types of animal facilities that panel members are likely to encounter:

- *laboratory animal facilities*

These are the most common animal facilities in Canada. Mice and rats are the animals most commonly found; other animals used by some institutions include rabbits, guinea pigs, chickens, hamsters, gerbils, cats, dogs and non-human primates. Panel members will find the *CCAC guidelines on: laboratory animal facilities – characteristics, design and development* (2003) and Chapters II, III, V and VI of Vol. 1 of the CCAC Guide most useful in assessing the management of laboratory animal facilities and the care provided for the animals. Panel members should look for cleanliness and organization within the facilities, with written procedures for animal care/facility management and records for animal care and use. In addition to being housed in clean, safe and appropriate cages or pens, animals should be provided with some form of environmental enrichment (see Chapter VI of Vol. 1 of the CCAC Guide for more details). Forms of environmental enrichment include group housing or frequent contact with conspecifics or with caregivers, hiding places, resting surfaces or boards, nesting material, devices that can be chewed or gnawed, and variety in the food items provided to the animals. Forms of enrichment vary according to the species being housed and according to the nature of the studies being conducted.

- *aquatic animal facilities*

Fish, amphibians, aquatic reptiles and small numbers of marine mammals can be found in aquatic facilities. Information about these species can be found in Chapters I, II, III and XVII of Vol. 2 of the CCAC Guide and in the *CCAC guidelines on: the care and use of fish in research, teaching and testing* (2005). Aquatic facilities should be clean and well organized, with written procedures for animal care/facility management and records for animal care and use. Surfaces should be waterproof, and electrical installations should be waterproof and safe.

The conditions in which the animals are being kept should ensure their comfort, health and safety, with particular attention given to water quality.

- *farm animal facilities*

Cattle, swine, poultry, horses and sheep are commonly found in farm facilities. Panel members will find Chapter IV of Vol. 1 of the CCAC Guide, along with the Livestock Codes of Practice of the Canadian Agri-Food Research Council, most useful in assessing the management of farm animal facilities and the care provided for the animals. Panel members should look for cleanliness and organization within the facilities (comparable to a well run conventional farm, not to laboratory animal facilities), with written procedures for animal care/facility management and records for animal care and use. Farm animals should be housed in clean and comfortable quarters, and should be provided with safe and comfortable flooring/bedding. The best form of environmental enrichment for most farm animals is group housing, or at least frequent visual/olfactory contacts with conspecifics.

- *wildlife holding facilities.*

Wildlife holding facilities are the least common facilities for animals used for experimentation. They vary widely, depending upon the species being held (information about various species can be found in Volume 2 of the CCAC Guide, in the *CCAC guidelines on: the care and use of wildlife* (2003) and in the species-specific recommendations that can be found at: www.ccac.ca/en/CCAC_Programs/Guidelines_Policies/GDLINES/SpeciesSpecificGuidelines.htm. Wildlife holding facilities are not comparable to laboratory animal facilities, in most cases. Animals should be kept in conditions which ensure their comfort, health and safety and which allow them to express at least some of their natural behaviours, while not endangering the health and safety of animal care staff.

What are the specific tasks of panel members after the visit?

- 1- The panel meets after each day of assessment to draft its preliminary findings and recommendations.
- 2- Within eight weeks, normally, of the visit, the Scientific Writer forwards a draft assessment report to the members of the panel and of the Assessment Committee. The panel and Assessment Committee are asked to provide comments/approval of the report within 1-2 weeks. Any comments provided are discussed by the Assessment Director who conducted the visit and the Scientific Writer, and are either integrated directly into the report or are first discussed with the author of the comments. If no comments are received after the due date, it is presumed that the panel or Assessment Committee member is in agreement with the contents of the draft report.

3 - Institutional implementation of recommendations:

- The institution is requested to forward its response to any Major recommendations expressed in the assessment report within a suitably short time frame defined by the CCAC Secretariat;
- The institution is requested to forward its response to any Serious recommendations expressed in the assessment report within 3 months, normally, of the report being received by the institution;
- The institution is requested to forward its response to any Regular recommendations expressed in the assessment report within 6 months, normally, of the report being received by the institution.

Panel and Assessment Committee members are asked to examine the institutional implementation report(s) and to return their comments within 3 weeks of receipt of the report(s). The Assessment Committee also assigns a CCAC status to the institution (according to the *CCAC policy statement on: Compliance and Non-compliance*, October 1999).

The credibility and professionalism of the CCAC Assessment Program are dependent upon the performance of its assessment panels. The Canadian Council on Animal Care is deeply appreciative of its panels' contribution of time and effort in helping to fulfil the mandate of the CCAC.

(CCAC policy statement on: assessment panel, March 1999)

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