

Care-full stories: Story 2: Do we care? (Mice)

November 2022



Set up

Setting:

This story is meant to highlight issues for discussion around: different kinds of care and empowerment to speak up. The setting is unspecified.

Set up:

In person:

Three people sitting or standing in a triangle. Who is positioned where in the triangle does not matter. Everyone should be visible. They move one spot to their right at the specified points.

Online:

Read as is (ignore stage directions related to movement). Do not make eye contact with any other reader.

Characters:

- **Animal Technologist** (Animal Tech)
- **Researcher**
- **Named Veterinary Surgeon** (Vet)

The characters are discussing a situation they were involved in together.

Stage directions in italics.



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Script

Animal Tech: Perhaps one day we will reach a time when we don't need to use animals at all. Until that time I will do my best to give them the best possible care. I am their voice. But I am also here for the science. I care.

Researcher: The scientific aims and objectives of my research are paramount. But of course I also appreciate the need to care properly for all animals, to adhere to the 3Rs, to identify humane end points. I know I take responsibility for my animals and we have a good team. I care.

Vet: Animal care must be a priority. I will care for any animal in the best way possible to help the Licence Holder fulfil their responsibilities. And more. I care.

Researcher: There are so many things to consider in our work. So many perspectives and priorities. The well-being of the animals, the importance of the science, staff, institutional obligations and commitments –

Vet: The health of the animals, their role in a scientific study, doing no unnecessary harm –

Animal Tech: – the everyday care and welfare of the animals. The science and the animals both benefit from good care and the best possible treatment, but there was this one time –

Researcher: I do my best by the animals and people involved in my work, but there was this one time –

Vet: Usually there is a clear understanding and unity between the animal care and the science, but there was this one time –

Animal Tech: I didn't know what to do. It just didn't feel right. I was worried about the colony.

Researcher: The project was progressing well. There wasn't long left. Some final tests and then the project would end. But I was feeling the pressure.

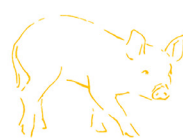
Vet: It was a complicated situation. I felt conversations needed to be had.

Animal Tech: I wasn't happy. I kept being told everything was fine, the colony is fine.

Researcher: The Animal Tech seemed concerned about the colony. But I reassured them that everything was fine, the colony was fine.



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Vet: There's a conversation I always have with new Licence Holders in determining whether a colony is fine. And it really hit home again on this case I was handling.

All move one chair to the right

Animal Tech: Within a few weeks the colony of mice were in a very poor condition. Listless, low, just overall concerning. I felt they were suffering.

Researcher: The mice in the colony seemed a little bit off colour. Nothing they couldn't manage or that affected the research. They weren't suffering.

Vet: The main thing you have to get your head around, as a named vet, is that you are not thinking about saving an animal for a research program but to prevent and alleviate suffering. And sometimes, to do that, we have to euthanize an animal or a whole colony.

Animal Tech: I remember when they arrived. They were really active; playful and inquisitive. I was with them every day.

Researcher: I remember when the colony arrived. A large chunk of my time and budget was dedicated to getting things right for them. We were doing great work together.

Vet: We had a good and agreed care plan for the colony. We established this collaboratively when they arrived. A great group.

Animal Tech: I put fun tunnels in for them and they loved it. And I loved watching them.

Researcher: We get taught to not get attached to these animals. That it plays with your objectivity.

Vet: Anyway, as I was saying, you have to look at it and ask "Will this animal or colony be a good scientific subject?"

Animal Tech: They got worse and worse. It was awful to witness. But nobody listened. Eventually I only had one choice left.

Researcher: I didn't agree with the Animal Tech. I was surprised by what happened next.

Vet: Then you have to advise the Researcher accordingly. You can inform the Researcher of your assessment of the animal or colony's condition, but after that it's ultimately up to the Researcher.

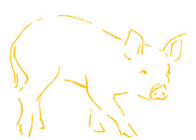
Animal Tech: I pulled the whistleblowing clause. This was definitely a situation where I needed to tell someone with authority my concerns.

Researcher: It complicated my project. I lost money. I lost data.

All move one chair to the right



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Animal Tech: I struggled a lot with my decision. But when you don't feel heard your options become limited.

Vet: It's difficult when you give advice and you don't feel listened to. You don't really have any further options.

Researcher: It's hard when others don't seem to understand your perspective. Your decisions become more difficult.

Animal Tech: If you don't look out for the colony you're not respecting the mice.

Vet: Providing information for good decision making is part of respecting the colony.

Researcher: You don't want to give up early because then the colony will have suffered for nothing. That's not respecting the animal. Especially when they are suffering by the nature of their existence already.

All move one chair to the right

Animal Tech: Poor mice. But I really enjoyed working with that model.

Researcher: They were an excellent colony of mice.

Vet: A decision was made that we could no longer proceed with the strain.

Animal Tech: Did I provide good care? And who cares for me?

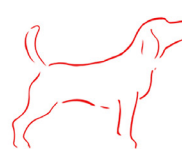
Researcher: Didn't I provide good care? And who cares for me?

Vet: What does care look like? Do we...care?

end of script



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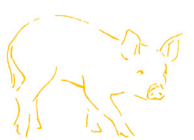


Questions for discussion

1. Was good care provided here? Where?
2. Who feels empowered to speak up here?
3. Do you have any similar experiences? Would you like to share any of them?
4. What are the different perspectives existing here?
5. Does good care look different for different species?
6. What, if any, other questions are raised for you in this scenario?



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Acknowledgements

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