

The History and Future of the Laboratory Animal Welfare Training Exchange (LAWTE)

A Glimpse into the Evolution of Training in Laboratory Animal Science

Stacy Pritt, DVM, MBA and Grace Aranda, LATG

The concept behind LAWTE was that of necessity. Marilyn Miller Heath (then of Sandoz, the predecessor of Novartis) and Sally Tyree (then of Burroughs Wellcome) were having dinner together at the 1993 AALAS meeting in Nashville discussing, and not for the first time, compliance and training. Since the Animal Welfare Act revisions of 1989, each research institution was scrambling to develop its own employee training program to meet the new requirements. In the absence of a good collective resource from which to design and develop training, each institution was re-inventing the wheel. Marilyn and Sally brainstormed the need for a national group that could facilitate the exchange of tips and strategies on training programs for scientific personnel working with lab animals so that excellent ideas and best practices could be shared. Michelle Calkins (then from Glaxo) later joined the cause.

After coming up with the name for the exchange group (the Laboratory Animal Welfare Training Exchange or LAWTE), the three founders got their companies to pitch in some seed money for the first LAWTE Conference that was held in Raleigh in 1994. Fellow trainers were drafted to present on a variety of topics but had to travel at their own expense. The conference was enthusiastically received and over 100 people were in attendance with individuals hailing from all over the United States and the United Kingdom. Attendees received enormous conference binders filled with excellent training references. At the end of the meeting the attendees voted to continue LAWTE and its first Advisory Council was elected.

The Early Years

The second LAWTE Conference was held at Stanford University in 1996 and was hosted by Gary Morrow. Continuing to grow with interest both nationally and internationally, this conference paved the way towards a more formal organization. The LAWTE Advisory Council accepted a proposal to place the

next LAWTE meeting in St. Louis, to be hosted by Dr. Nicole Duffee at Washington University. Dr. Duffee is now the Director of Professional Development and Education at the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science (AALAS). The 1996 LAWTE Conference attendee database became the basis for the LAWTE member database that is maintained to the present day.

Dr. Nicole Duffee developed and programmed the first LAWTE website, which was originally hosted at Washington University and later by AALAS. A main feature of the website was, and continues to be, the ability for members and others to post useful training materials so that trainers may benefit from them. Dr. Duffee also developed the LAWTE listserv, which is hosted by AALAS. This listserv reaches over 300 individuals whose primary job function is training, as well as those individuals who have an interest in training in the field of laboratory animal science. Oftentimes, practical questions and resources are shared through this active listserv. It was also during this time that Amy Wickholm created the LAWTE logo.

In order to advance the mission of LAWTE administratively, the conference program committee realized in 1997 that a formal organizational structure would permit a greater reach in LAWTE activities. Therefore, Dr. Cindy Hoorn of Pfizer established LAWTE as a 501(c)3 (non-profit) organization by submitting the incorporation documents to the federal government and the state of Michigan. At this time, the first officers of the organization were elected. Dr. Duffee was elected as LAWTE's first President, while Dr. Hoorn and Ms. Grace Aranda were elected as the organization's first Treasurer and Secretary, respectively. Dr. Duffee was kind enough to host the next two LAWTE Conferences in St. Louis at Washington University in 1998 and 2001.

The Evolution of LAWTE and Training

Early LAWTE conferences focused on the basics of training...why training is needed, what are the

expectations of external auditors when they look at training programs, what training topics are essential, etc. The majority of speakers were veterinarians and experienced managers of large laboratory animal programs, in addition to representatives from the Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care, International (AAALAC), the USDA, and the National Institutes of Health (NIH). In 2001, however, the field was starting to develop beyond establishing the need for training. Institutions were recognizing the value of having well-developed training programs and individuals were now needed to support and manage these training efforts. At the 2001 LAWTE Conference, Bruce Kennedy (2007 AALAS President) spoke on "Creating a Training Coordinator Position." This session eventually became a seminal publication in *Lab Animal*.¹ Thus, trainers in laboratory animal programs were recognized as full-time employees with training as their primary job function and given a formal title. This moved the field away from having technical and management staff perform training functions on the side, trying to balance training needs with their managerial functions. The field was also moving towards more computer-based training and digital images rather than paper-based methods and Kodachrome slides.²

The LAWTE Conference held in Tucson, AZ in 2003 marked a change in focus for the group's meetings. With the inclusion of full-time trainers in many laboratory animal programs, the need for training had been established and embraced. Now, it was time to train the trainers. Sessions now focused more on training tools, materials, resources, and strategies that active trainers could immediately utilize to improve their programs.³ The San Diego conference in 2005 marked the highest attendance in LAWTE's history – with nearly 200 individuals. Additionally, the organization continued with its international tradition. Through the years, people from Europe, the United Kingdom, and Australia have attended LAWTE Conferences either as presenters or attendees.

Future Programs and Directions

LAWTE continues to grow and expand along with the field of animal-based research. As trainer positions become more defined (e.g. Training Manager, Training Coordinator, Training Specialist, etc.) the need for more sophisticated approaches to staff, IACUC, and researcher development; training documentation; and validation of the training process are needed. In 2006, Dr. Martha Rooks revamped the LAWTE website to reflect newer technologies and increase storage capac-

ity for training materials, job postings, and announcements. LAWTE has now committed itself to sponsoring training-specific sessions during the AALAS National Meeting and other laboratory animal meetings to meet the educational needs of trainers. Also, to increase the organization's recognition in the field, LAWTE has recently announced the creation of the LAWTE Founders Award to recognize an outstanding educator or trainer in the field of laboratory animal science and/or regulatory compliance. LAWTE also maintains its strategic relationship with AALAS and partners with AALAS on a variety of training initiatives and various programs.

Boston is the site of the 2007 LAWTE Conference. The city is home to world-class biomedical research and some of the largest laboratory animal programs in the United States. A record-breaking crowd is expected as the agenda will reflect the newest methods in training and present a premier time for networking and idea sharing (a hallmark of LAWTE meetings). An impressive line-up of speakers will once again establish new standards and share best practices as training within the field of animal based research continues to expand and mature.

References

1. Kennedy, B.W. (2002). Creating a Training Coordinator Position. *Lab Animal* 31(6):34-38.
2. Kennedy, B.W. (2005). The Evolution of Education and Training in Laboratory Animal Science...the perspective of one. 5th Conference of the Laboratory Animal Welfare Training Exchange. San Diego.
3. Pritt, S., Samalonis, P., Bindley, L., and Schade, A. (2004). Creating a Comprehensive Training Documentation Program. *Lab Animal*. 33(4):38-41.

Dr. Stacy Pritt is Director of Regulatory Operations and Senior Veterinarian at Covance Research Products, Inc. She holds a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree from Washington State University and an MBA with a specialization in Healthcare Management. She is the President of LAWTE. Dr. Pritt can be reached at stacy.pritt@covance.com.

Grace Aranda is IACUC Certification Coordinator at the University of Arizona and is the Secretary of LAWTE. Grace can be reached at garanda@u.arizona.edu. www.lawte.org