

Behind the Curve of Medical Education: The Use of Dogs for Physiology Instruction at New York Medical College

A Summary of the Report by the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine

- Every spring New York Medical College (NYMC) uses as many as nine dogs in a first-year physiology course. At the end of the class, the dogs are killed.
- NYMC is one of only eight U.S. medical schools (out of 125) that continue to use live animals to instruct physiology courses. About 90 percent of U.S. medical schools have eliminated all animal use in standard courses.
- Since 2006, three other New York state medical schools—the University of Rochester School of Medicine & Dentistry, Mount Sinai School of Medicine, and Stony Brook University School of Medicine—ceased using live animals in their medical student courses. NYMC is the only medical school in New York state (out of 12 allopathic and two osteopathic schools) still following this archaic practice.
- Advances in medical simulation technology and computer-based interactive learning, increased awareness of ethical concerns, and progressive curriculum reform recognizing the need for human-based learning are a few of the many factors that have contributed to the replacement of live animals in medical education.
- On March 10, 2007, the American Medical Student Association (AMSA) House of Delegates voted unanimously in favor of a resolution stating that AMSA “strongly encourages the replacement of animal laboratories with non-animal alternatives in undergraduate medical education.”
- Francis L. Belloni, Ph.D., NYMC physiology professor and director of the first-year physiology course, has admitted that information conveyed in the dog lab could be learned in other ways.
- NYMC obtains its dogs from a Class B random source animal dealer who has been cited for numerous violations of the federal Animal Welfare Act.
- On June 20, 2007, the Health Law Committee and Legal Issues Pertaining to Animals Committee of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York sent a letter to NYMC condemning the school’s use of live animals in medical education.
- Columnist Noreen O’Donnell, whose commentaries in *The Journal News*—in both print and online editions—have consistently condemned the use of live animals, has written that, “this is about training medical students, and with so many schools using simulators, how do you justify killing these dogs?”
- NYMC claims its live animal lab is necessary to educate “competent and compassionate” physicians, yet the school’s own students are allowed to opt out of animal use. No objective information has been presented suggesting that students who opt out are less competent or compassionate, or in fact that the live animal lab contributes to better performance later in medical school or after graduation.