

Jan. 28, 2014

By: Kenneth Litwak, D.V.M., Ph.D., associate director of laboratory medicine. The details of Wilma's, Freddie's, and Hazel's lives were obtained from health records, received by court order, from Wayne State University via the Michigan Freedom of Information Act.

Lives of Wilma, Freddie, and Hazel

These are the stories of Wilma, Freddie, and Hazel. Their stories are illustrative of the many dogs who have been and continue to be subjected to heart failure and hypertension experiments at Wayne State University in Detroit, Mich.

Researchers at Wayne State have spent a generation creating heart failure in dogs to try to understand human heart failure. These dogs are forced to run on treadmills, with a goal of understanding why people with heart disease cannot exercise in the same way as a normal person. Yet, after more than 20 years of funding by the National Institutes of Health, these experiments have resulted in no new treatments for people with heart failure.

Wilma

Consider the life of Wilma, who was born on April 17, 2011, at Covance Research Products, Inc., in Cumberland, Va., a facility designed to provide dogs for experimental procedures. For her first year of life, she did not have a name, just the identification code CCDMCE tattooed on her ear. She was a brown and white hound, who was loaded into a crate and placed on a truck on April 12, 2012, at 7 p.m. (four hours after her last access to food and water). At 3 a.m. on April 13, when she should have been sleeping, she was given food and water. Then, after 12 hours in a crate, she was delivered to Wayne State.

Wilma was unloaded and examined by a veterinary technician, who noted that she was sweet and friendly, but a little shy. On April 18, Wilma was found to have a cyst growing between the toes of her left rear foot. Cysts are a common occurrence in dogs used in experiments, because of the grating that they must walk on all day. By April 20, her cyst had broken open and was dry, but Wilma did not want to walk on the treadmill, as required in the experiment. Rather than wait for her cyst to heal, Wayne State personnel decided that she was no longer useful to them. They tried to return her, but the breeding facility would not take her back. Instead, on May 22, at 9 a.m., Wilma was given an injection of pentobarbital and had her chest opened up. We have no record of what was done in that experiment. Five hours later, she was killed.

Freddie

Freddie's life followed a similar trajectory to Wilma's. Freddie was born at the same Virginia dog breeding facility on April 2, 2011. As with Wilma, for the first year of her life, she didn't have a name, just the identification code CCDMAL tattooed on her ear. Unlike Wilma, who was only in a shipping crate for 12 hours, Freddie's travel ordeal stretched over 26 hours. When she was finally delivered to Wayne State on May 10, 2012, she had been fed once in the previous 30 hours.

When Freddie was first examined by a veterinary technician, she was described as a brindle and white hound, who was shy, but friendly and curious. Indeed, Freddie was shy, as communications by laboratory personnel state that she had to be carried out of her pen. Still, Freddie was forced to go on the treadmill multiple times over the next 10 days, where she was described as "nervous." Then, on May 23, 2011, Freddie's health record had the following note: "Trained on treadmill – very nervous today, bouncing all over the treadmill, pulling, chewing at leash. Stopped training after 3 min. Dog ok once off treadmill, alert and happy."

Like Wilma, once Freddie wouldn't run on the treadmill, she was of no use to the experimenters who had purchased her. On June 4, 2012, Freddie was injected with pentobarbital, had her chest opened up, and was killed five hours later. As with Wilma, we have no idea what happened during Freddie's final surgery.

Hazel

Imagine undergoing four surgeries in five weeks. Hazel, a little brown and white hound, did when she was barely 1 year old. On Nov. 6, 2012, her chest was opened up, a device was placed on her aorta, another on one of her coronary arteries, and a third monitoring device was implanted into her heart. Two weeks later, Hazel's neck was cut open and two devices were placed on her carotid arteries, which could be used to stop blood flow to her brain.

One week after her second surgery, Hazel had to undergo another major operation. In this operation, her abdomen was opened up and six different devices were implanted, including three devices designed to block blood flow to her kidneys or the lower half of her body. Then, on Dec. 13, 2012, Hazel had her final surgery. Her neck was opened up again to place a catheter into her thyroid artery.

Hazel, who was barely 45 pounds, had 12 different devices implanted into her body. Then, with no indication that any data was collected from her, on Dec. 20, 2012, Hazel was killed.