

Chapter Five

The History of the American Society of Laboratory Animal Practitioners

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The American Society of Laboratory Animal Practitioners (ASLAP) was formally organized in 1966 with the following objectives:

- provide a mechanism for the exchange of scientific and technical information among veterinarians engaged in laboratory animal practice;
- encourage the development and dissemination of knowledge in areas related to laboratory animal practice;
- act as a spokesperson for laboratory animal practitioners within the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) House of Delegates and work with other organizations involved in the care and use of laboratory animals in representing common interests to the scientific community and the public at large; and
- actively encourage its members to provide training for veterinarians in the field of laboratory animal practice at both the pre- and post-doctoral levels and lend their expertise to institutions conducting laboratory animal medicine training programs.

There has always been a close association between the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science (AALAS), its predecessor, the Animal Care Panel (ACP), and the veterinary profession. Veterinarians were among the founders of AALAS, and have continuously provided support and assistance to the Association. Among the organized groups of veterinarians who have had a close working relationship is the American Society of Laboratory Animal Practitioners (ASLAP).

This group of veterinarians, engaged in laboratory animal practice, had its origins with several informal meetings held in Philadelphia in 1965 during the National Meeting of the

Animal Care Panel. The discussions were prompted primarily by two events. At the national level, Congress passed Public Law 89-544, the Animal Welfare Act, and ordered its implementation by the United States Department of Agriculture during 1966. The original legislation decreed the registration of research facilities conducting biological research with various species of laboratory animals-if the organization received any federal funding. Two important features of this legislation included provision for periodic inspections of animal housing and research facilities by government inspectors and a requirement that registered facilities have a designated attending veterinarian who would be responsible for the facility's animal care program.



Charles Hunter was one of the founding members of ASLAP.

During this period in the middle 1960s, only a limited number of organizations, primarily academic institutions, employed veterinarians to oversee their animal care programs. The passage of the Animal Welfare Act, with its requirement for registration of several hundred research facilities, caused some veterinarians in the biomedical research field to recognize there soon would be a need for many additional attending veterinarians with some knowledge of the biology and care of various laboratory animal species. Estimates of the number of veterinarians needed ranged from several hundred to more than 1,000. At that time, there were very limited opportunities for veterinarians to receive formal education in laboratory animal medicine and care. None of the 16 North American veterinary colleges of that day had a single formal course about laboratory animals, and there were few post-doctoral curricula in laboratory animal medicine. Two pioneers in the field who conducted such programs were Dr. Thomas Clarkson at the Bowman Gray School of Medicine at Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and Dr. Bennett Cohen at the University of Michigan College of Medicine at Ann Arbor. A second concern that prompted the Philadelphia discussions was the announcement that the American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine (ACLAM, founded in 1957) was going to terminate associate memberships during 1966. This specialty board within the AVMA was the group that conducted annual examinations for certification in the specialty of laboratory animal medicine. In addition to its certified membership, for its first 10 years it also had associate members. The intent for this member class was to prepare candidates for certification by offering continuing education programs. However, at that time there were many associates who were not seeking certification, but were interested in attending the educational sessions. When it was announced that the associate membership class was being terminated, there was a concern by some associates that other opportunities for continuing education in laboratory animal care, practice, or management were needed for a significant group of veterinarians, who did not necessarily desire certification in the specialty. It is interesting to note that this genesis of ASLAP occurred at a meeting of the Animal Care Panel, demonstrating the presence of veterinarians and the combining of interests between AALAS and ASLAP from their earliest times.

As a result of the two events and the Philadelphia discus-

sions, some two dozen veterinarians decided to explore the founding of a veterinary group to focus on continuing education in the various aspects of animal care. Dr. Alden E. Stilson, Jr. from the College of Medicine at The Ohio State University, drafted a constitution and by-laws for such an organization. Much of the effort in establishing ASLAP was made by Dr. Stilson, and his early direction and efforts assured a successful launching of the American Society of Laboratory Animal Practitioners. Others from the group attempted to define the mission parameters and even the name and constituency for such a group. At the 1966 annual AALAS meeting in Chicago, the results of a year of correspondence and telephone calls led to the formation of the American Society of Laboratory Animal Practitioners (ASLAP). The membership consisted of licensed veterinarians who were members of the AVMA or graduates of a school approved by the AVMA who for any reason had an interest in the care or use of laboratory animals. The group sought affiliation with the AVMA (and later, with AALAS), and sought a voice for laboratory animal medicine and care within the House of Delegates, the governing body of the AVMA. It was envisioned that ASLAP would complement ACLAM, providing educational opportunities for those seeking certification in the specialty of laboratory medicine. However, it also sought to serve a larger body of veterinarians — those many veterinarians who would become attending veterinarians for registered research facilities, as well as private practitioners who were interested in increasing their span of laboratory animal knowledge. Several founding members who contributed greatly to establishing this education mission included Drs. Albert Schaffer, Charles Hunter, Charles Thayer, Murray Wardall, Luther Albert, Dennis Kohn, Robert Whitney, William Winchester, and Arthur Peters. The first ASLAP constitution was signed on September 29, 1966, by 37 founding members; there were 52 charter members by December, 1966. On July 11, 1967, ASLAP was incorporated in the State of Illinois.

Considerable thought and discussion centered on the respective roles of ASLAP and ACLAM within the veterinary profession. It was clear that ACLAM was the certifying body for the rapidly expanding specialty of laboratory animal medicine within the American Veterinary Medical Association. At the same time, the AVMA recognized the desirability for groups of veterinary practitioners within the profession who shared a common interest in various species — bovine, equine, and sheep, for example. Therefore, it was a logical step for the AVMA to consider a group of practitioners focused on laboratory animal species and a mission of promoting knowledge and continuing education.

There also was a deliberate connotation in selecting the use of “practitioner” to be used in the name of the group. While the phrase “laboratory animal medicine” was commonly understood to include animal care and clinical medicine, it was felt by a majority of ASLAP’s founders that the interests or responsibilities of many in the group went beyond husbandry and clinical medicine. Many of the founders had administrative and budgetary responsibilities with their employers. Training animal caretakers was a frequent responsibility. The designing of animal housing and/or biomedical research facilities often was assigned to a veterinarian, as was the selection of animal caging and equipment. Laboratory animal “practitioner” was a description that seemed to embrace all activities related to laboratory animal husbandry and care.

During the middle 1960s, the growth of biomedical research

and its supporting resources was explosive, and required the participation of increasing numbers of veterinarians. There was an urgent need for a great deal of shared information and cooperation among veterinary practitioners who were knowledgeable and working in the field. It was envisioned that ASLAP would serve to meet those needs within the veterinary profession. ASLAP’s emphasis on continuing education was and continues to be the primary orientation of ASLAP. An early decision by its founders was that there would be at least two annual educational programs. As an AVMA affiliate, the society was expected to conduct its annual business meeting in conjunction with the annual AVMA meeting. However, a sizeable group of members from the society attended and participated in the annual AALAS meeting. Hence, there would be two programs of continuing education each year, one at each organization’s annual meeting.

Along with forming the Society, establishing its mission and plan of operation, the founding members also established two simultaneous objectives—gaining recognition by, and affiliation with, the American Veterinary Medical Association and then by AALAS, and creating training or educational programs at annual meetings of the AVMA and AALAS. Concurrent with these primary efforts was the solicitation of membership among interested veterinarians.

Drs. Stilson, Hunter, and Peters concentrated on establishing relationships with the AVMA and AALAS, and written application as an affiliate was made to the AVMA. Affiliate status was granted in July 1967, and the society was incorporated as a nonprofit educational corporation in the state of Illinois. Drs. Stilson and Steven Pakes developed the first educational program — a one-day session held at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical School in Dallas, in conjunction with the July 1967 AVMA meeting.

In October of that year, ASLAP conducted its first program in conjunction with an annual AALAS meeting. Dr. Charles McPherson was the principal speaker at a seminar discussing federal financial support for research facilities and programs.

As ASLAP continued to evolve plans for educational programs, two of the driving forces behind developing educational sessions of the highest quality were Drs. Alfred Edward and Sigmund Rich. With assistance from a range of experienced practitioners and experts, these two veterinarians organized a number of in-depth seminars with various subjects during the first several years. These sessions were presented at both AVMA and AALAS National Meetings. On several occasions, they organized weekend workshops dedicated to extensive review of the primary topics of the ACLAM certifying examination. These early efforts set the tone for the variety of subjects that has followed to the present time, and launched the theme of continuing education that remains the focus of ASLAP.

Another important activity of the new group was the initiation of a newsletter. The newsletter was intended to provide administrative and business information to the entire membership, especially those who were not able to attend all of the semiannual educational sessions.

The newsletter, named “SYNAPSE” for its connotation of a communications connection, was first edited by Dr. Donald Gisler. There have been a number of distinguished editors following Dr. Gisler, but perhaps no one did more to establish the quality and character of the technical content than former editor Dr. John B. Mulder. His subtle wit and diligent effort in assembling an informative and interesting quarterly publica-

tion rapidly gained recognition among his peers. A founder of the original Animal Care Panel, Dr. Nathan Brewer, was an early contributor of articles about various laboratory species, and continued to contribute fascinating articles long after he had retired from the University of Chicago. In September 1998, the newsletter name was officially changed to "Laboratory Animal Practitioner."

Once membership affiliation was obtained with both the AVMA (1967) and AALAS (1968), the administrative goal was to gain a seat in the House of Delegates (AVMA's governing body). This was deemed essential if ASLAP was to contribute a voice about animal welfare and rights issues that were becoming more prominent in the biomedical research community. The Society had to attain at least 200 members before the AVMA would consider admitting it to the House of Delegates. That strength was achieved in 1971, and ASLAP became a regular member. Dr. Charles C. Hunter, who was instrumental in gaining the seat, was elected as the Society's first AVMA delegate. After numerous discussions between the AVMA and ASLAP officers, the AVMA formally recognized the growing importance of laboratory animal medicine as an emerging veterinary discipline and established the section on laboratory animal medicine as part of its annual meeting education program. The first sessions were held in 1972, and in 1973 ASLAP joined with ACLAM in co-sponsoring educational sessions; a move which has continued to the present time.

In a similar fashion, ASLAP members continued to contribute to the AALAS programs and activities. Members of ASLAP (who often were also members of AALAS) worked with the AALAS technician membership in planning and conducting the sessions at the annual AALAS meetings. Members served as chairs or assistants for numerous educational sessions and workshops; provided members to the AALAS Board of Directors; and in a number of instances, provided members for leadership positions, including the office of AALAS president. However, the supportive activity often bringing the most satisfaction to ASLAP members was working with the AALAS technician committees that established standards for animal technician certification. It was gratifying to experience the interest and effort by many technicians in this difficult, but important, task. It was also gratifying to watch the technicians assume increasing responsibility for the growth and course to be pursued by AALAS, so that AALAS truly became their organization.

By the middle 1970s, the American Society of Laboratory Animal Practitioners had grown in membership to a level to assure its financial viability and operational success. Of the 300 ASLAP members in 1976, 250 were also members of AALAS. The pattern of semi-annual educational sessions (one at the annual AVMA meeting and one at the annual AALAS meeting) was established. That pattern included co-sponsored educational efforts with ACLAM. Through its membership in the AVMA House of Delegates, ASLAP was able to provide a response to the rapidly increasing concerns and issues about animal welfare and animal rights. ASLAP established a dialogue with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), which is responsible for administering the federal Animal Welfare Act.

ASLAP vigorously supported the establishment of, and urged AVMA support for, the American Association for Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care (AAALAC), now the Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory

Animal Care International.

In 1984, ASLAP President Dennis Kohn planned the first ASLAP annual noon luncheon with the primary emphasis to get all the ASLAP members together for fellowship and fun. Each year for the past 14 years, a special speaker is invited to entertain and/or educate the membership. Most members look forward to the event, held at the AALAS National Meeting. In 1991, ASLAP celebrated its 25th Anniversary at the AALAS meeting held in Buffalo, New York.

ASLAP continuing education seminars are held every other year prior to the AALAS National Meeting. These special workshops were developed to allow in-depth study of specific subject areas relevant to the practice of laboratory animal medicine and science. The following workshops have been presented during the past 12 years: 1986, "Containment and Exclusionary Housing Systems for Laboratory Animals (KIKO)"; 1988, "How to Put Support Area Spaces in Your Animal Research Facility"; 1992, "Surviving in the Nineties in the Animal Research Facility (S.I.N. in the A.R.F.)"; 1994, "Transplant Medicine and Surgery"; 1995 "Aquatic Management Workshop" in conjunction with the Laboratory Animal Management Association; 1996, "Take the Sting Out of Pain"; and 1998, "Fresh Approaches to Cardiovascular and Immunological Research: Basic Science and Animal Models."

The society continues to mature, with more than 920 current members. ASLAP has co-sponsored (with ACLAM) a number of economic surveys, has sponsored additional educational programs with laboratory animal practitioner relevant seminars at the North American Veterinary Conference in Orlando each year, and sponsored the ASLAP/AALAS pre-symposium workshop for technicians at the 4th National Biosafety Symposium in Atlanta. In addition, ASLAP has developed a table top display to promote ASLAP and laboratory animal practice at the "Career Opportunity Exhibits" of the AVMA, AALAS, North American Veterinary Conference meetings, and at the student AVMA conferences held at a different veterinary schools each year. Student chapters of ASLAP have been organized, chartered, and remain active at North Carolina State University, Louisiana State University, and the University of Illinois-Urbana-Champaign.

The ASLAP/USDA Interface Committee started providing support to USDA training programs in 1991. The committee has continued to work with the USDA to provide training support and improved professional communication between veterinarians involved in laboratory animal medicine and the USDA. Articles provided by the USDA are published in the ASLAP newsletter, "Laboratory Animal Practitioner," and a preceptorship program for USDA veterinary medical officers (VMOs) has been established. The first training program was held in the Philadelphia area for a six-week period. Two USDA Veterinary Medical Officers rotated through various institutions in the area. Since the initial preceptorship program, a number of USDA VMO's have participated in this program. This educational and training effort has been successful and a new training site in the Chicago area has been established.

The ASLAP Veterinary Student Liaison Committee was charged with developing and distributing a "career notebook" for veterinary schools entitled "Opportunities in Laboratory Animal Medicine." First published in 1993, this reference notebook provides general information on laboratory animal medicine and its speciality organizations; laboratory animal science and biomedical research organizations; information

on careers and training in laboratory animal medicine; and post-doctoral training opportunities and veterinary student preceptorship/externship opportunities. Notebooks are distributed to student coordinators (ASLAP members) at the 31 veterinary schools in the United States and Canada.

The notebook is updated as required to maintain it as a "living document." This committee also developed and published a new brochure entitled "A Career in Laboratory Animal Medicine" that has been distributed globally.

The Council on Research of the AVMA created a Panel on Animal Surgery in Research and Teaching to develop a report on guidelines for performing animal surgery in a research or teaching setting. A draft panel report was referred to the American Society of Laboratory Animal Practitioners. Since the organization's major focus is the role of veterinarians in research using animals, it was appropriate that ASLAP further refine this report. The special report entitled "Guidelines for Animal Surgery in Research and Teaching" was authored by Marilyn Brown, DVM, Phillip Pearson, DVM, PhD, and Farol Tomson, DVM and was published in the *Journal of the AVMA* in September 1993. This article has been very well received by the research community.

The ASLAP Informatics Committee was formed in 1994 under the leadership of Dr. Ken Boschert and under the AVMA's Network of Animal Health (NOAH). The objectives included the ability to maintain an active presence of ASLAP in electronic/computer media, provide an electronic meeting area for laboratory animal specialists, provide an active message area to encourage posting and answering questions, and maintain an active calendar of events relevant to the specialty. The ASLAP web page now has its own official address which is: www.aslap.org. ASLAP uses the AALAS server, but maintains a separate home page.

It was proposed in 1996 that ASLAP change its constitution so ASLAP members would not be required to be members of the AVMA, as was currently the case. The AVMA rules required that any affiliated organizations represented in the AVMA House of Delegates must have membership equal to 1 percent of the AVMA membership (at least 500 ASLAP members would be required to be AVMA members). This action was approved by the ASLAP Board of Directors and the general membership. In addition, it was proposed that an ASLAP by-laws change

be made to extend the terms of the ASLAP AVMA Delegate and Alternate Delegate from four years to six years. The proposal was based on the fact that it takes a long time to learn the AVMA "politics," and continuity and experience of the delegates would benefit the ASLAP membership. This action was approved by the ASLAP board and the general membership in response to a mail ballot.

In 1996, the ASLAP Board of Directors approved the expenditure of \$2,000 a year to support the ASLAP Excellence in Laboratory Animal Research Award in conjunction with the American Veterinary Medical Foundation and the AVMA Council on Research. This award is in recognition of research to improve the health and well-being of laboratory animals used in biomedical research. The first recipient of this award was ASLAP member, Dr. Mark Suckow.

In 1997, President Jerry Silverman presented a new ASLAP mission, vision, and value statement to the Board of Directors. The following were approved by the board:

Mission of ASLAP: The American Society of Laboratory Animal Practitioners (ASLAP) promotes the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge, ideas, and information among veterinarians and veterinary students having interest in laboratory animal practice. The society does so for the benefit of laboratory animals, other animals, and society in general.

Vision of ASLAP: By the year 2000, the American Society of Laboratory Practitioners (ASLAP) will be the nation's premier organization providing veterinarians and veterinary students with education and training in the practice of laboratory animal medicine.

Value Statement of ASLAP: Being composed of veterinarians and veterinary students, the American Society of Laboratory Animal Practitioners (ASLAP) believes that laboratory animals do not differ from other animals in their need for proper preventive and therapeutic medical care, nutrition, physical, and psychological comfort, and all other elements that contribute to their health and well being. To the best of our ability we, the membership of ASLAP, will continually strive to define, meet, and improve upon these needs of laboratory animals.

Now, as the American Association for Laboratory Animal Science celebrates its 50th anniversary in 1999, ASLAP is pleased to share in that celebration and looks forward to the next 50 years of a continuous fruitful collaboration.