

Preparing dogs for study life: improving welfare, efficiency and data output

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The dog is the preferred non-rodent species in the safety assessment of new compounds. Despite their wide-spread use (>100,000 used globally each year in research) we know little about their welfare and the impact of routine practices on their welfare. While some form of training is frequently recommended in legislation and guides, there is very little guidance available on effective training protocols. As a result, many practices are based upon anecdotal evidence.

While there is a broad desire to implement effective training for many aspects of laboratory-housed dog use, there remain a number of barriers to uptake, including lack of resources specific to the research environment, lack of confidence in training techniques and concerns about interference with study outputs. At the outset of a new collaborative project across UK industry, we present evidence-based resources for care, technical and scientific staff to support the implementation of Refinements. Best practice for a number of protocols will be shared.

In this talk, a number of techniques employed to prepare dogs for study life will be presented. These include positive reinforcement training, desensitisation, increased predictability, modified handling and modified dosing techniques. Empirical evidence demonstrating the both the welfare benefits and ease of implementation of an effective, positive training protocol for laboratory-housed dogs are described. As with any planned Refinement, it is necessary to evaluate the effects of a training programme using a validated method. We have developed welfare monitoring tools which can be employed by care staff and technical staff to monitor the impact of planned Refinement on home pen welfare, and to evaluate progress in training.