Standard Operating Procedure: Reporting Sick Animals

The identification of sick animals is everyone’s responsibility: investigators, research technicians, veterinary technicians, and the Division of Laboratory Animal Medicine (DLAM) laboratory animal technicians (LAT). LAT’s are an excellent resource in identifying sick animals because they are in the animal housing rooms daily and are required to observe the animals for signs of potential illness. LATs also handle the animals during routine cage changing.

When a DLAM employee identifies a sick animal, they place a green Health Check on the animal’s cage and enter the specific cage card number and identified problem into the Vet Care computer system. If the sick animal requires immediate veterinary care, the LAT calls the veterinary technician office at 966-2906 or pages the veterinarian or veterinary technician on-call at 216-1235.

When a researcher identifies a sick or injured animal, they should place a green Heath Check card (located in the black card file box or in a drawer in the cart in the animal room) on the cage with the health problem noted on the card. In order to ensure that the veterinary technicians are notified of the sick animal, the researcher can either directly contact the veterinary technician office at 966-2906 or can notify the LAT responsible for that room. If a researcher is unable to contact either of these in person the researcher should call the veterinary services pager at 216-1235, rather than leaving a voicemail message. The veterinary technician or LAT will then enter the information into the Vet Care computer system. If it is an emergency, the researcher must page the veterinarian or veterinary technician on-call at 216-1235. The researcher should supply the following information: condition of the animal, investigator name, building name, room number, and the rack where the animal is located.

The veterinary technician examines the animal within 24 hours (if a non-urgent case), contacts the laboratory (by phone using the lab number provided on the room contact sheet, by email using the list of laboratories who have provided their lab email, or verbally if the responsible person is in the room and discusses the animal’s condition). Depending on the degree of severity, the veterinary technician may discuss the circumstances with the clinical veterinarian(s) and a course of action will be determined.

If the recommended course of action is euthanasia or using the animal experimentally, the green Health Check card may be left on the cage to identify the animal. Usually a red Vet Care card is placed on the cage. Once the animal is euthanized or used experimentally, the person performing the procedure should date and initial the card and place the card in the
designated location within the animal room. The veterinary technicians collect the cards and enter the date and resolution of the case into the Vet Care computer system.

If the recommended course of action is treatment or monitoring, the veterinary technician will replace the green Health Check card with the red Vet Care card. A member of the veterinary staff will attempt to contact a member of the research lab to discuss treatment options. If the veterinarian deems that immediate treatment is necessary for the health of the animal, initiation of treatment will not be delayed beyond 24 hours. The veterinary staff will update the record and note the treatment’s duration. For rodent cases, this usually means they will affix a treatment label to the red Vet Care card. The information will include details such as: drug/amount, route, frequency, and duration (start date to stop date). Each time the medication is administered, the administrator must initial the record. If there is no indication that medication was administered on the first day, the LAT will initiate treatment on the second day and continue the daily treatments as indicated on the label. DLAM will assess a fee for medications administered by the LAT. If the researcher has missed a treatment and wishes to continue performing treatment, they should contact the LAT to make arrangements to resume responsibility for treatments. Please do not remove the red Vet Care cards from the cage. It is the responsibility of the veterinary technician to resolve the animal case and remove the cards from the cage unless the animal has been removed from the cage. When the animal has been used in a study or euthanized, make a note on the card (initials and date) and place the card in the appropriate location within the room. REMEMBER: The red Vet Care card is a veterinary medical record. Please do not dispose or remove this medical record from the animal room.

References:

1. DLAM Standard Operating Procedure: Care of Mice (Example)
2. DLAM Standard Operating Procedure – Health #2: Reporting and Treatment of Sick Animals