

Group takes aim at University of Michigan's use of dogs to train doctors in medical procedures

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An animal welfare group said it filed a complaint Wednesday against the [University of Michigan](#) to stop it from using dogs in training doctors in emergency medical procedures.

The [Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine](#) said it filed a complaint with the [United States Department of Agriculture](#), which administers the Animal Welfare Act. The group says U-M is one of only a handful of medical schools across the country that uses anesthetized dogs rather than human cadavers or life-like human models.

U-M says a small number of dogs - fewer than 20 a year, which are bought from a dealer of research animals - are used in a course on advanced trauma life support. The course teaches emergency medical procedures so doctors can learn to save the lives of hospital patients with severe trauma, such as from a gunshot wound or automobile accident.

"There are validated better ways to teach these life-saving skills to physicians than to use dogs," said John Pippin, senior medical and research adviser for the animal welfare group. Pippin said the procedures are so invasive that the dogs have to be euthanized afterward.

It is not clear what action USDA would take in response to the complaint. A USDA representative said Wednesday she could not confirm or deny that the agency has received a complaint.

A copy of the complaint provided by the physicians committee claims the instructor of the U-M course, Dr. Richard Burney, is violating the Animal Welfare Act.

Burney did not return telephone calls Wednesday, but another U-M official, Howard Rush, an associate professor who is the director of the unit for laboratory animal medicine at U-M, said all of the applicable rules on the procurement and use of the dogs are followed. Rush said Burney is an experienced surgeon who believes using dogs in the course is the best way to teach the life-saving techniques.

"If I go to an emergency room I'd much rather have somebody who has practiced on a live animal personally, than having practiced on a mannequin, because the total biological experience is going to be different," Rush said. A mannequin, he said, cannot replicate the experience of training on living tissue.

Of the nine institutions in Michigan that offer advanced life-saving courses, Pippin said, U-M is the only one to use live animals. He said the animal welfare group is surveying institutions in the United States and Canada that offer the course. Of the 198 that have responded, more than 90 percent (181 institutions) do not use live animals. He said the animal welfare group is pressuring all of the remaining institutions to stop using animals.

Rush questioned the survey's usefulness, saying it may include many small institutions that are dissimilar to U-M, a large research university.

The American College of Surgeons is the body that accredits the courses, but leaves it up to the discretion of the instructor whether to use animals or not.

Of all the animal research that takes place at U-M, the vast majority - 98 percent - involves rats, mice or fish, U-M says.

Pippin said the physicians committee obtained documents through the Freedom of Information Act that show **the university is using lost dogs or pets that were surrendered to a shelter, and were then taken to the Howard City research animal dealer used by U-M. The dogs included a malamute named Koda and a stray golden retriever that had been wearing a collar when it was picked up and taken to the shelter.**

"We also think there is something wrong with a university participating in a pound-seizure agreement and purchasing dogs who were former family pets or were strays," Pippin said.

The Humane Society of Huron Valley in Superior Township does not provide animals for research from its shelter.

Reporter Dave Gershman can be reached at 734-994-6818 or dgershman@annarbornews.com.