

AAALAC International Technician Fellowship 2009

I consider The “Fellowship” to be the capstone honor of my career! The trip to the United Kingdom was wonderful and rewarding. Words can't express my gratitude to AAALAC International, the IAT, Priority One and to my gracious and kind hosts in England for the educational opportunity of a lifetime. Thank You!

The trip was fascinating on so many levels; similarities and differences—in culture, caring, regulations and training, facilities and ethics. As a full time instructor in lab animal science, the fellowship allowed me to compare and contrast teaching, procedures, and pedagogy. My hosts understood my objectives; put up with my constant questions and allowed me to take photographs to share with my future students (which I understand is a huge thing in the UK for security purposes). The accommodations were great, the travel and commuting for me was a fun-filled adventure. My hosts, no matter their title, were kind and considerate. The IAT Congress was wonderful, warm and enlightening. All connections seemed easy and the time was well planed and well spent.

The first facility I visited was the Medical Research Council's (MRC) National Institute for Medical Research (NIMR). The NIMR was founded in 1913 as the first Institute of the MRC, which was founded in the same year. This government sponsored organization is similar to our National Institutes of Health. NIMR is one of the MRC's largest units and concentrates on four major areas of research: Genetics & Development, Infections & Immunity, Neurosciences, and Structural Biology. While at the NIMR, I spent time in the Procedural Services Section (PSS), SPF Transgenic Facility and the Laidlaw Rodent and Aquatic units.

I enjoyed my time around Salisbury England, known for the site of Stone Hedge, and in our discipline; the Centre for Macaques (CFM) is a breeding facility for rhesus macaques which are used in academic research in the UK. Owned by the Medical Research Council and Wellcome Trust (the UK's largest funders of medical research) and the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, the CFM aims to be a centre of excellence in primate welfare and care. There is an emphasis on training animals for husbandry and procedures and ensuring that animals are well socialized with humans.

From there I was on to Cambridge; renowned as one of England's two great University towns. Steeped in history and tradition, it has been described as one of the most beautiful cities in Britain. It has a population of around 100,000 people and has a wealth of museums and galleries covering a wide range of interests. I visited the MRC's Laboratory for Molecular Biology which was founded in 1947 and moved to its current premises in 1962. The aim of the Laboratory is to interpret biological phenomena at the molecular level by a wide range of studies on the structure of proteins, nucleic acids, membranes, organelles and viruses, and by research on the mechanisms and control of gene expression and the three-dimensional organization of cells. Housed in a new £31million rodent facility; this is a green field site, 2 story (service deck above animal areas) + 3500 square metre foot-print. Included are new caging systems (Tecniplast Greenline IVCs), Isolators, Detach robotics, Tecniplast bottle washing machine, VHP chambers, autoclaves etc. During off hours; my hosts and I took a tour of the Cambridge Colleges, pubs and restaurants. We talked about the background to the UK legislation regarding the use of Animals in Scientific Procedures, UK-specific issues, and compared them to how it is in the US.

The last facility I toured was the Imperial College of London, Central Biomedical Services at the Sir Alexander Fleming Institute. We discussed the differences and similarities of training for those who work with animals. Since I teach Laboratory Animal Science to Veterinary Technician students; I was surprised to hear that the training of our equivalent, the UK Veterinary Nurse, gets no training or exposure to lab animal science!

Training and course work in our integrated discipline is gained through The Institute of Animal Technology (IAT), founded in 1949 and is the foremost professional body in the field. The IAT's purpose is to advance knowledge and promote excellence in the care and welfare of animals in science and to enhance the standards and status of those professionally engaged in the care, welfare and use of animals in science. Representing animal technicians and technologists both within the UK and Europe, the IAT has over 2200 members made up of individuals and 60 corporate organizations, including the vast majority of the UK's Named Animal Care and Welfare Officers (NACWOs). NACWOs have a legal obligation to be, "actively involved, on a day to day basis, in safeguarding the welfare of the protected animals bred, kept and used at designated establishments."

Education and qualification is a key role of the IAT. The IAT is recognized by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) as a formal Awarding Body (4), for its Further Education qualifications in animal technology, leading to Membership (MIAT). The IAT is currently developing a Graduate Programme, leading to degree level qualifications and Fellowship (FIAT) of the IAT.

The IAT Congress 2009 is similar to our Annual AALAS Meeting. Delegates were treated to a varied and interesting range of scientific papers and posters and were able to register for four very popular workshops. The Brit's have as much fun and enjoy the camaraderie in learning and sharing at their IAT Congress as we do at our AALAS Meetings! The experiences and memories of this "Fellowship" will be with me for a long time. I hope this fully funded educational opportunity continues. I'm grateful for the chance to be an AAALAC International Technician Fellow.

Cheers !!!!
Kenneth C Pyle