

Retention and job satisfaction in animal research – what can we learn for creating an institutional culture of care?

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As in other caring professions, providing care and compassion for research animals in challenging situations can be both rewarding and difficult. It can be rewarding to maximize animal welfare and contribute to high quality research in preclinical studies but can be challenging to observe stress in research animals, or to sacrifice them for research. This particular situation, often called a caring-harming paradox, is unique for caring professions including animal care professionals. Both distinctive factors, and typical workplace stressors like long working hours, can lead to reduced professional quality of life. Professional quality of life can be divided into compassion satisfaction and compassion fatigue. Given the gaps in research on workplace stress in animal research personnel the 3Rs Collaborative's Compassion Fatigue Resiliency initiative aimed to examine associations between reported job satisfaction and key workplace metrics for the first time. To gain quantity and quality data over time, we created a mixed-method cross-sectional survey for longitudinal research. Baseline data was collected from 198 participants. In summary, personnel who reported higher compassion satisfaction also reported higher retention and job satisfaction. In contrast, lower job satisfaction was associated with higher burnout. We also found indications that organizational culture impacts compassion fatigue for 70% of participants (n=118); specifically factors like feeling valued, work-life balance, training or pay. Our findings indicate that fostering a culture of care should also focus on a supportive work culture by promoting job satisfaction and decreasing burnout.