CONCLUSION

Various methods of euthanasia have been described and the need for further research and refinements where appropriate have been emphasized. This report would be incomplete, however, without stressing what the Humane Society of the United States considers to be one of the most important variables in humane euthanasia: namely, the human factor. No matter how humane a particular method of euthanasia is, in the wrong hands, it may be quite inhumane. For example, rough handling and restraint, over-crowding too many animals together in a gas or decompression chamber, inadequate routine checking and maintenance of equipment can, singly or in combination, make any given method of euthanasia distressing and inhumane. For an overly distressed or excited animal, the whole euthanasia process will take longer and often result in even more distressing side effects. No matter what agent, drug or method is used to cause death, the way in which it is used may be even more important than the relative merits of one method over others. Once a particular agent, drug or method is selected for use, two controls to reduce the probability of improper use must be instigated; namely: educational instruction of personnel and frequent supervisory scrutiny and re-evaluation; routine maintenance and “spot” tests for the working efficiency and accuracy of all equipment and monitoring devices (pressure gauges, flow meters, etc.). In some states in the United States, laws have had to be enacted to insure proper use and maintenance of such equipment, but without adequate enforcement and frequent supervisory scrutiny and “spot checks” of personnel and equipment alike, there is no way to guarantee that any given method of euthanasia is always humane. These considerations should always be kept foremost in mind in the application of current methods of euthanasia and in the development of future refinements and new methods.

Postscript

In developing more humane methods of euthanasia, and especially in developing more accurate techniques to assess the degree of consciousness, we should be mindful of the following phenomenon: that under apparently deep anesthesia, some human patients may have periods of total awareness as to what is going on in the operating room. We still have much to learn about various states of consciousness in humans and other animals and this is of particular concern in those methods of euthanasia where there is a relatively long latency between “unconsciousness” (as determined clinically or by EEG) and death, as there is more general concern over a long latency between consciousness and unconsciousness.

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APPENDIX

Regulations and Sanctions Governing the Use of Barbiturates for Animal Euthanasia in the U.S.A.

Sodium Pentobarbital is a Schedule II substance and can be obtained only by a licensed medical practitioner, such as a physician or veterinarian. The physician or veterinarian must apply for and be issued a Controlled Substance Registration Certificate by the Drug Enforcement Agency. The application forms are available from any of the DEA Regional Offices. Normally it requires about six (6) weeks for a veterinarian to obtain a DEA Registration Certificate.

Also in Texas, a Texas Controlled Substances Registration Certificate, issued by the Texas Department of Public Safety, is required. Each of these Registration Certificates is issued to the veterinarian as an individual and drugs must be delivered, stored, and used only at the address shown on these Certificates.

The veterinarian or physician who obtains the controlled drugs is personally responsible and accountable for all drugs received and dispensed. Records must be maintained for at least two years and are subject to audit by DEA at any time.

Even though the veterinarian is properly registered with DEA and DPS, each drug order must be accompanied by a DEA Order Form. Each of these forms is numbered and must be accounted for. Each form is made in triplicate which is precarboned. The first two copies are sent to the supplier. Even the carbon paper must be sent with the order. The supplier is not allowed to fill any order unless it is properly made out and the carbon paper is intact.

Drug Security

When a shipment of controlled drugs is received, each carton should be checked for leakage, breakage, or any shortages. After the individual cases are checked, they should be resold and a notation made on the case of the date the check was made. At this time the last copy of the DEA numbered form is completed showing the number of units received and the date of receipt.

Also, a record should be maintained on a local form. This will give you a running summary of all drugs received as well as all other information needed for an inventory or audit.

DEA requires that stocks of controlled substances be kept in a securely locked cabinet or safe. I strongly recommend that you use a combination safe for the best security of your stock of drugs. Access to the safe should be limited to as few employees as possible.

Facility and Equipment

A room which is adequate in size and basic standard equipment is essential when large numbers of dogs and cats are destroyed by the injection of pentobarbital sodium. Many times the room which was formerly used for euthanasia was converted after the old equipment was removed.

Reference