

Episode: *Author Interview: “How Should Treatment of Animals Beyond the Lab Factor Into Institutional Review?”*

Guest: Laurie Sellars, MA

Host: Tim Hoff

Transcript: Cheryl Green

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[bright theme music]

[00:00:03] TIM HOFF: Welcome to another episode of the Author Interview series from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*. I’m your host, Tim Hoff. This series provides an alternative way to access the interesting and important work being done by Journal contributors each month. Joining me on this episode is Laurie Sellars, an associate research scholar and a postgraduate fellow with the Law, Ethics & Animals program at the Yale Law School in New Haven, Connecticut. She’s here to discuss her article, coauthored with Dr Jeff Sebo, “*How Should Treatment of Animals Beyond the Lab Factor Into Institutional Review?*”, in the September 2024 issue of the Journal, [Nonhuman Animal Research](#). Laurie, thank you so much for being on the podcast.

LAURIE SELLARS: Oh, thank you so much for having me and for featuring the article.  
[music fades]

[00:00:50] HOFF: So, what is the main ethics point that you and Dr Sebo are making in this article?

SELLARS: Yeah. So, the main ethics point that we’re making in our article is that animals used in research are vulnerable to many harms, not only within but beyond laboratories and experiments. And humans have a responsibility to consider all relevant harms, not merely the ones within laboratories and experiments. So, at present, standard ethical frameworks and institutional review procedures for assessing the permissibility of animal research focus pretty narrowly on the treatment of animals within experiments. But of course, humans, researchers make decisions about every facet of lab animals’ lives before and after experiments occur, including at really important moments in these animals’ lives like breeding, being transported between facilities, and when experiments conclude, which for the animal usually means being killed.

And so, our argument is that just because these impacts occur outside of experiments doesn’t mean that humans don’t have a responsibility to consider them. We absolutely should be considering them and factoring them into institutional review. And we also note that if we applied standard ethical frameworks to practices beyond the lab, to the impacts of animals beyond the lab, doing so would likely raise the bar for approving many animal experiments. And if we applied more demanding ethical frameworks than current standard frameworks, then in some cases, certain beyond-the-lab practices might be forbidden outright.

[00:02:52] HOFF: And so, what's the most important thing for health professions students and trainees to take from your article specifically?

SELLARS: Yeah. So, I think the most important thing for health professions students and trainees to take from the article is that, as I mentioned in the previous question, our treatment of lab animals matters regardless of whether that treatment is occurring within or outside of laboratories. And even though current standard ethical frameworks and institutional review don't comprehensively account for potential harms beyond the lab, students and trainees involved in animal research can still consider these impacts and incorporate them into their decision making about whether to undertake a particular study or in their thinking about how a study is designed.

So, for example, even if not required by institutional review, students and trainees can consider how animal research subjects will be transported to their research facility and could try to prioritize least harmful methods of transportation. Or, as another example, instead of defaulting to killing animals at the end of experiments, students and trainees could investigate whether there are potentially opportunities to adopt animals to private homes or retire them to sanctuaries. Yeah, those are just a couple of examples of how I think individual health care professions students and trainees can start assimilating a more comprehensive consideration of lab animals' wellbeing into animal-based research.

[00:04:40] HOFF: And finally, if you could add a point to your article that you didn't have the time or the space to fully explore, what would that be?

SELLARS: If we could've added one more point to our article, we would've liked to have discussed how many of the harms that animal research subjects experience, whether it's within or beyond the lab, could best be addressed by investing in and applying scientific methods that don't involve animal models. Many such methods, like organs on a chip, are promising and in development, but these alternatives at present are largely underinvested in. Right now, many research institutions train researchers to view even minor potential benefits to humans as outweighing major realized burdens on other animals, which has in turn driven institutions to invest in and focus on animal research, with little to no exploration of or investment in alternative methods.

So we continue to view animal research as quote-unquote "necessary" while also continuing not to invest in alternatives that would make that research less necessary. Transitioning away from animal models to these alternatives would reduce potential harms to lab animals, both within and beyond the lab, by reducing or eliminating the need for animal-based experiments in the first place. [theme music returns]

[00:06:18] HOFF: Laurie, thank you so much for your time on the podcast today, and thanks to you and your coauthor for your contribution to the Journal this month.

SELLARS: Thank you so much, again, for having me.

HOFF: To read the full article, as well as the rest of this month's issue for free, visit our site, [journalofethics.org](http://journalofethics.org). We'll be back soon with more *Ethics Talk* from the *American Medical Association Journal of Ethics*.