



## Our Research Associates

Editorials are supposed to provide provocative ideas to the reader. To accomplish this, editors are asked to supply thoughts that are on the fringes of commonly accepted practices. We may step out on a limb and then sometimes saw the part of that limb that is closest to the tree trunk. The events that follow should be dramatic. In many instances we take the fall, but this is done in the hope that the reader gains from the experience.

Today I find myself writing an editorial that I hope will not be controversial. Instead, it will be far more personal, more subjective, than any previous commentary that has come from my desk. The reason is that I just lost one of my pets, a beautiful dog named Amos. With his passing, I find myself thinking about all the things that pets provide and how little they ask in return. We have all heard that animals provide unconditional love. They provide us with an enormous boost when we are down and they never appear to suffer from the emotional ups and downs that afflict humans so often. There is nothing profound here. Anyone who has been fortunate enough to have a pet has seen the truth in these comments.

The reason that I am writing this editorial, beyond the cathartic experience that it brings me, is to laud the contributions that animals have made towards science. Indeed, we will never see a great ape or beagle dog win the Nobel Prize, but we need to know that in medicine most of the procedures that we use in routine practice began with animal research. Without the contribution of animals in the research laboratory, the series of serendipitous events that led to the appreciation that biocompatible materials could support bone growth adjacent to their surface would never have occurred. Truly, the incredible research of our forefathers toward the appreciation of osseointegration would not have been possible without animal models.

We have seen the list of animals that contributed to these research efforts. Mice, rats, rabbits, cats, dogs, minipigs, and higher primates, to name a few, have all been participants in animal research. Most were cooperative partners, although I have spoken with a few investigators who describe a few less willing participants. For those investigators, it seems that they would prefer to avoid future contact with a few of their animal partners.

The interesting thing is that we often hear about concerns for the ethical treatment of animals in research. Having been involved in some animal research, I can say that every human that I have known to participate in animal research has been an animal lover like myself. They know that the animals are the most committed members of the research team and they respect this absolute contribution. When animal researchers discuss "their" animals, the conversations always show the animals the respect and dignity that they so deserve. Their concerns for a sacrificed animal are personal and professional.

My pal Amos' contribution to science will never lead to a cure for cancer or even a new implant surface. He did, however, provide a permanent place in my heart that added to and continues to add to my quality of life. I know that his brothers and sisters will continue to dedicate their lives to the betterment of ours and, whether in the actual conduction of an experiment or in the encouragement of an experimenter, this will continue to propel science.

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