

## Contributing to Your Culture of Care

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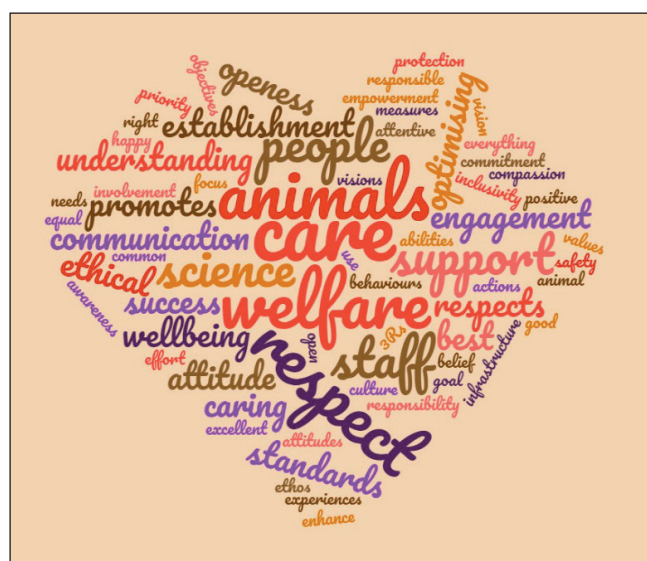
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## Abstract

There is a growing recognition that nurturing a Culture of Care can lead to staff satisfaction and improved Animal Welfare. The phrase Culture of Care is not well defined and can mean different things to different people. Whilst a Culture of Care involves all staff working directly and indirectly with animals it is important to recognise and support those who carry the burden of care i.e. the staff that conduct procedures on and care for animals used in research. These staff may be referred to differently according to establishment and role but can commonly be referred to as Animal Technologists, Animal Technicians, Animal Scientists or care staff. This article provides practical examples and ideas of how you can contribute to a Culture of Care in your workplace and methods by which you can be supported to do this.

**Keywords:** culture of care, animal welfare, science, compassion, management.



**Figure 1.** Culture of Care Word Cloud.

## Introduction

What does a Culture of Care mean to you? Do you feel cared for, respected and valued at work? A Culture of Care is underpinned by an organisation's values and beliefs. These set the tone and expectation of the behaviours and attitudes of the people within the organisation. Having a positive Culture of Care is essential to delivering high quality care and support to both research animals and staff.

## Doing some detective work

Let us start with some detective work of your own. There are plenty of resources which you can access to read up more on the topic of a Culture of Care.<sup>1,2,3,4</sup> However, can you find out the following information in your own workplace? Go and talk to the people you work with, your Named Animal Care and Welfare Officers (NACWOs), Animal Welfare Ethical Review Body (AWERB) members, your unit manager, the Named Veterinary Surgeon and fellow Animal Technologists.

## Ideas



**1. Does your Establishment have a Culture of Care vision or pledge?**

If this does not exist you or your manager can propose the idea to your NVS and AWERB. The vision or pledge should encompass all perspectives including researchers and other roles less directly involved with the hands on animal research. Therefore developing a vision or pledge is an ideal activity to be led and/or sponsored by the AWERB. The process of bringing the perspectives together in generating the pledge is almost as important as the pledge itself. A vision or pledge should be made visible (e.g. on display in the animal facility and labs). This is a way for all staff to see the commitment of the organisation to a Culture of Care. An example of a Culture of Care Pledge is attached in Appendix 1.

**2. How often does your AWERB discuss a Culture of Care?**

Think about how you would find this out. Is your AWERB visible? Are agendas shared widely e.g. to all animal facility staff? If not speak to your NACWO or NVS and establish whether Culture of Care is on the agenda and if not propose it is. Remind the NVS and AWERB that promoting a Culture of Care is a general task of the AWERB.

**3. Does your staff induction training highlight a Culture of Care?**

What happens when there are new staff or users in your animal facility or in the research groups? Is an introduction to the establishment Culture of Care part of induction. If you have developed a vision or pledge within your establishment sharing this at induction is a good way to set the tone and demonstrate that Culture of Care is taken seriously. It is also a way to highlight the expected values and behaviours within the facility.

**4. Does your Establishment encourage an open AWERB with ethical debate? Are animal technicians members of the AWERB?**

The NACWO is often a member of the AWERB. However are animal care staff and technicians represented in their own right outside of the NACWO role. How can you input your views and have your voice? Are the mechanisms for you to feed into the AWERB discussions? For example in large organisations it may be difficult to have a completely open AWERB due to the numbers of staff that would involve. Another mechanism might be to propose an animal technician/care champion role on AWERB who can act as a focus to feed in the thoughts and concerns of the wider group.

**5. Do animal technical and care staff receive any recognition awards and thanks for their work and achievements?**

A Culture of Care should recognise positive behaviours and work of staff. This could be as simple as a thank

you/reward certificate for good cage side practice, coffee vouchers or even a more formal staff Culture of Care celebratory award.<sup>5,6</sup>

**6. Does your organisation celebrate the Institute of Animal Technology (IAT) Technicians Month each year?**

What examples can you find of past events and celebrations in the month of March each year? Did your unit display a TechMonth participation plaque?<sup>7</sup> If not speak to your unit manager about what you can do to celebrate Technicians Month next year. Organise staff competitions, speakers and cake and coffee events.

**7. Does your organisation support your role in Openness on Animal Research?**

Are there opportunities for you to host unit tours to visitors and students? Are you able to participate in other openness activities for example school speaking events or family days? Many Animal Technologists/care staff value the opportunity to take pride in their work through tours and talks. This should be encouraged as it can enhance satisfaction in the job.

## Contributing to a Culture of Care at work



**Figure 2.** Teamwork.

During the first UK COVID-19 lockdown the IAT campaigned for the recognition of animal care staff as “key workers” in the biomedical field.<sup>8</sup> This should illustrate the importance of the role you do and make you feel proud. What sort of things can you do to further enhance your job satisfaction and pride in your work, wellbeing and to help champion a Culture of Care at work?

Be proactive and raise new ideas with your co-workers and supervisors. Discuss things openly and see what is achievable. As a manager support staff when they raise new ideas and provide time to implement refinements. Providing structured support for technical staff to demonstrate the value of refinements is critical.

Report any Animal Welfare or other concerns you have immediately through raising concern/whistleblowing channels. These can generally be reported anonymously if you are worried but do speak up! If you are unaware of such channels ask your manager or NVS about them. If they do not exist this is something your NVS and NACWO should raise with the AWERB.

Sign up for the UK National Centre for Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of Animals in Research (NC3Rs) newsletter that provides Animal Technologists with the latest news. It includes updates on recent advances in the 3Rs and new resources, research and events of interest to animal technicians.<sup>9</sup>

Managers should ensure their staff are recognised for their contributions to Animal Welfare e.g. one way might be to suggest they compile an entry for 'The Andrew Blake Tribute Award'.<sup>10</sup> As a manager provide the support for staff by reviewing the submissions and helping make them the best they can be. The Andrew Blake Tribute Award is awarded annually to the Animal Technologist judged to have made the most significant contribution to improving standards in laboratory animal welfare.

Design posters which showcase your work and cage side innovations that promote animal welfare. These can be on display within your facility. shared with your AWERB and they can also be submitted as a poster or a short presentation at IAT Congress or a technicians' workshop. (Editors note: and or, to Animal Technology and Welfare for publication).

Look after yourself. Self-care is important as compassion fatigue is recognised within caring professions including within the Laboratory Animal Profession.<sup>11,12</sup> Compassion satisfaction results from satisfying the positive feeling of caring for others.<sup>13</sup> Compassion satisfaction can be enhanced by being engaged with your work by having two way communication with scientists so that you understand the benefits and outcomes of the work and by being respected, valued and recognised for the role you play. 'Action for Happiness' is an organisation that encourages people through providing ideas and resources to enable them to take action at home, at work or in their community. Downloading and sharing the monthly calendars within the animal facility could be a valuable way to support staff.<sup>14</sup>

Discuss your career development with your supervisor and make the most of training and self-development opportunities.

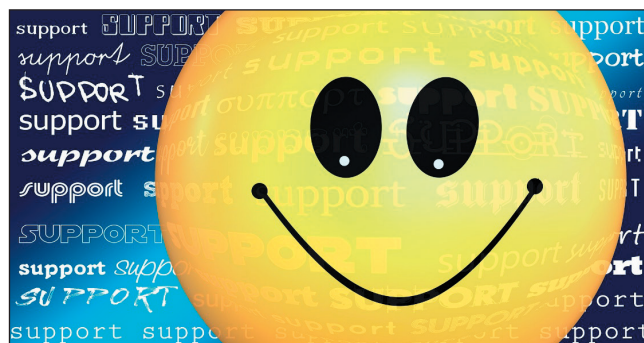
## Using training and development opportunities

Training supports the acquisition of new skills and knowledge helps boost confidence in the workplace and

can improve organisational culture by ensuring technical and care staff are up to date with new technologies and literature in relation to their roles. Speak to your manager during your annual review and suggest that you draw up an individual learning record for the next 12 months, Your manager can also support a Culture of Care by helping you make sure that your training records are kept up to date.

Find out about training opportunities within the workplace, whether these are conducted internally or through attending external workshops. For managers:- does your department have a staff training budget and what proportion of this budget is assigned to animal technical and care staff?

When you attend workshops come back and share your knowledge with the rest of your team, thus promoting new techniques and good practice. One excellent free workshop for animal technical and care staff is the annual NC3Rs/IAT Animal Technicians' symposium.<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 3.** Support.

## Discussion

A workplace with a Culture of Care is vital to allow animal technical and care staff to fulfil their potential and to minimise the risk of compassion fatigue. A Culture of Care provides the framework that will enable the behaviours that drive continuous improvement benefitting both science and welfare.

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## Research Data Availability Statement

The authors declare there is no primary data associated with this publication.


## Appendix 1



ANIMAL  
WELFARE  
ETHICAL  
REVIEW  
BODY



### Culture of Care Pledge



Those who conduct and support all aspects of in-vivo work are committed to the responsible care and use of all research animals at AstraZeneca, Alderley Park.

We will uphold animal welfare as a priority and treat animals and colleagues with care, compassion and respect. Take full accountability and responsibility for the treatment of animals in our care and act as the animal's advocate.

Key behaviours:

1. Adhere to the 3Rs when designing or performing studies e.g. appropriate use of animals, act to minimise pain and distress e.g. by use of humane endpoints and finishing studies when scientific objectives are met.
2. Continually review training programs and working processes so that procedures are performed to best practice.
3. Promote and support an open and honest working environment.
4. Work as one team, flexibly supporting colleagues, utilising strengths and diversity
5. Challenge when animal welfare has the potential to be compromised.
6. Take the time to act with diligence in every task, paying attention to detail, in order to produce high quality data and encourage a culture of double checking.
7. Embrace a culture of giving and receiving constructive feedback to aid continuous improvement.
8. Ensure timely and accurate communication with key individuals.

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