Guidelines for Animal Medical Record Keeping and Transfer of Records Between NIH Intramural Animal Facilities

Purpose:
In addition to being required by the *Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals* (*Guide*) and Animal Welfare Act Regulations, medical records are an essential component of the veterinary care program. They provide documentation of the care given to an animal and serve as a way to communicate information between veterinarians and other professionals, including research staff. This guideline specifically refers to records maintained for USDA regulated species with an emphasis on non-rodent species.

Record Keeping:

- Individual animal records will be created for regulated, non-rodent, species. Records will be created upon receipt of animals to NIH. For animals born at NIH, the birth and early medical record information may be maintained with the mother's medical record. An individual record for the offspring should be started as early as possible but no later than weaning or when an animal is enrolled on a study. Records may be maintained either electronically or in hard copy. Scanned documents with signatures are considered official.
- Different parts of a medical record may be kept in different locations as long as all parts are readily retrievable and reviewable by the veterinary, research, and Institute/Center Animal Care and Use Committee (IC ACUC) staff, as well as for external oversight review.
- All entries in the medical record will be dated and indicate the originator of the entry and be legible to someone other than the writer/author.
- Individual animal records will include general information (species, DOB/age, sex, owner institute and investigator), import documents, and regulatory and vendor information.
- Medical records for USDA covered non-rodent species will be maintained in a manner that adequately communicates pertinent medical information to any veterinarian receiving the record. These can be in paper or electronic format. At a minimum, medical records typically contain the following components as described by the American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine public statement on Medical Records.[3]
    1. Identification of animal or group;
    2. Clinical information including results of physical examinations, behavior of the animal and notations regarding observed abnormalities, illnesses and/ or injuries;
    3. Immunizations and other prophylactic treatments and procedures as appropriate for the species;
    4. Documentation of diagnostic tests and results following interpretation;
    5. Reference to research interventions, where appropriate;
    6. Treatment prescribed and provided, along with the clinical response and any follow- up required;
    7. Surgery, anesthesia, analgesia and peri-/ post-operative care;
    8. Control of pain and distress;
    9. Documentation of euthanasia or other disposition;
    10. Documentation of necropsy findings, if indicated.

An example hard copy medical record is attached to this guideline and can be used as a template.

Consideration should be given to including a "Master Problem List" which itemizes ongoing medical conditions and research manipulations that have a long-standing impact on the animal's health.

Transfer of Records:

- The original record or a complete, legible copy (paper or electronic) will be sent with the animal when it is permanently transferred between NIH facilities or outside of the institution. A truncated copy containing a summary of recent health information and treatments may accompany animals temporarily transferred between facilities for imaging or surgical procedures.
- The originating facility is responsible for implementing a system to indicate that the record/animal in question has left the facility and if it is expected to return, by what date. If the animal is not to return to the facility (due to permanent transfer or death) or the return date is unknown, documentation that the animal has been removed from the facility is placed into the animal's record.
- If the receiving facility received what it considers to be an incomplete animal record, it is their responsibility to contact the sending facility to obtain missing components of the record.

Archiving Medical Records:

- When an animal is euthanized (or upon death) while on study, the animal's complete medical record must be archived. Copies may be maintained in the animal facility or in a centralized office or storage space, so long as they are accessible to IC staff.
- If desired, hard copies of medical records may be scanned in and stored in an unalterable electronic format e.g., pdf or image file. A method for retrieving scanned records must be in place.

Medical Records Disposition:

- Medical records should be kept at a duration consistent with NIH Manual Chapter 1743: Appendix 1: NIH Administrative and Program Records Schedule 3000-C (Revised 12/18/2018, Page 33), and any other applicable regulations or laws. Individual ICs may set additional requirements.

References:

1. Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, ILAR, NAS, Eighth Edition, 2011.
2. USDA Animal Welfare Act Regulations. Title 9: Code of Federal Regulations, Chapter 1, Subchapter A: Animal Welfare.
3. Field K, et. al. Medical Records for Animals Used in Research, Teaching, and Testing: Public Statements from the American College of Laboratory Animal Medicine. ILAR J. 2007. 48(1):37-41

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