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My name is Angela Ewing and I work as a cardiac technician. This involves carrying out various medical tests on patients with heart problems. Technicians are encouraged to continue their education with courses such as higher national certificates and degrees, and so in 1995 I began a degree course in clinical science at NESCOL. Everyone enrolled in the course was like me, a hospital technician who spends their days working with people.

In the first year, the class used animal tissues, including green monkey cells, for practical work. Knowing what I do now, I look back with regret on participating in these practicals. In the second year, one area of study was pharmacology, in particular the study of drugs such as the cardiac drugs which would be prescribed to the patients we work with. One day we were asked to perform an experiment to investigate the effects of these drugs. As a technician I was obviously interested in learning this and, indeed, many patients ask what the drugs are for. However, we were expected to observe the effects of these drugs on the still-beating isolated hearts of live frogs!

This grim experiment was still two days away and so the frogs were still alive at that time. Along with another student, I explained to the unit leader that I didn't want to do this—that I didn't want to kill animals in my education and repeat experiments for gaining knowledge already known. I asked whether it would be possible for us to do a different assignment such as one using a computer package, one that did not involve the death of the frogs.

The experiment was to go ahead. I was told that it would be acceptable for me not to attend on that afternoon. But no arrangements were made for me to attend another class or to do an alternative practical, and the next day I was simply told to write up the experiment using someone else's results. As it seemed perfectly clear to me that using results obtained in this way was itself participating in the experiment, I wrote a letter to the Dean of the college explaining that I did not wish to take part in any experiment that involved hurting or killing an animal, especially as the course was set up exclusively for technicians who work only with people. There was no reply.

I asked my unit leader if it would be acceptable if I myself found a humane way of getting the relevant results. The response was rather vague: only good results were necessary.

Meanwhile, I researched alternative methods for learning the course material. I made inquiries to the Dr Hadwen Trust for Humane Research (www.drhadwentrust.f2s.com) which told me that the same experiment was available as a computer package and that using frogs was now a thing of the past. I myself bought the relevant package from Sheffield BioScience Programs and borrowed some similar ones from EuroNICHE [The European Network for Humane Education, now called InterNICHE www.interniche.org]. Using these to construct a set of results I wrote up my assignment and submitted it.

I then had a rather unpleasant meeting with the Dean of the Faculty who at one point

suggested to me that I “reconsider my position on this course.” I also learned that they expected me to perform an experiment the following year using guinea pig ileum. The College clearly wasn’t prepared to compromise on animal use nor to provide alternatives, and I wasn’t prepared to go through all of this again.

Reconsidering our position is exactly what my colleague and I did. We both left NESCOT. I transferred to Westminster College in London and I have never looked back. I am doing a BSc in medical physics and physiological measurement, which is also a degree course aimed at hospital technicians. At this college, I have not been asked to perform any grim experiments. There has been one dissection class, but when I asked not to take part the College was very helpful and provided alternative arrangements for me, using plastic models.

Both the isolated frog heart and the guinea pig ileum experiments are readily available on computer disc. When I last spoke to NESCOT, they had no plans to buy either of these and intended to buy more frogs and more guinea pig tissue the following year to repeat the experiments with the new class.