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Dear Dr. Dunagan, Dr. Gunn, and Dean Shapiro:

I am surprised St. Louis Children's Hospital still relies upon live animal labs for its Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS) curriculum. I respectfully urge you to replace the use of cats in intubation drills with synthetic models such as sophisticated simulators and manikins.

PALS course sponsor, the American Heart Association (AHA), doesn't require or promote animal use. Nonetheless, cats undergo multiple exercises in which plastic tubes are pushed through their windpipes. Students are encouraged to learn from their mistakes. But in this case, the "mistakes" are live cats who can bleed, swell and scar. Their lungs may collapse and improperly routed tubes can kill them.

Most PALS facilities nationwide now use human-focused models alone. Simulators yield data relevant to pediatric treatment because size and location of internal organs resemble human anatomy more precisely. Simulators also let trainees repeat procedures as often as necessary.

Animal-free learning tools cut overhead to confine, feed and destroy cats. A timely New England Journal of Medicine article highlights the "very detailed feedback and...more subtle measurement of trainee performance" gained from virtual reality simulators. The article summarizes: Inanimate models are "safe, reproducible, portable, readily available, and...cost-effective."

I hope you'll consider the AHA's recommendation that "any hands-on intubation training for the AHA PALS course be performed on lifelike human manikins."

Please drop live animal exercises for the PALS course and any other airway instruction. Medical training is better served by applicable and humane non-animal technologies.

Thank you,