Interagency Collaborative Animal Research Education

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ICARE Dialogues: Optimizing Performance During a Pandemic Crisis: Managing Teams Across Multiple Locations and Circumstances

Presenters: Interagency Collaborative Animal Research Education (ICARE) Project faculty members: Ivonne Chand O'Neal, Lynn Anderson, George Babcock, William Singleton, and Susan Silk.

A record of this meeting will posted on the OLAW website (https://olaw.nih.gov/home.htm) on the ICARE Project webpage (https://olaw.nih.gov/education/icare-interagency).

Silk: I'm delighted to welcome you to this session of **ICARE Dialogues**. The first topic for today is managing teams across multiple locations and circumstances. It is my pleasure to introduce Ivonne Chand O'Neal, and she will introduce her team.

O'Neal: Thank you, Susan. Hi, everyone. It's such a pleasure to be with you today. Before I have my colleagues introduce themselves, I want to let you know a little bit about what we're going to be talking about today. We have all been working remotely for quite some time now, and we have been finding ways to work with our colleagues and our teams. We have found ways that have been very effective, things that we needed to tweak a little bit, and actually find brand-new ways of engaging since we've been using this format so much. And it's getting difficult sometimes to maintain that kind of engagement. So that's what we're going to talk about today. This is a dialogue; it's a conversation. We really want to chat with you about what you've been experiencing - the things that have worked for you and the challenges that you've had. And how you've overcome them, or if you're still struggling with some of those things.

I'm Ivonne. I am a cognitive scientist. I study creativity and creative problem solving. I work in the arts and healthcare. I've done work with Crayola, with the Kennedy Center, and with OLAW. I'm really excited to apply creative problem solving to these different areas. I would like to pass the baton off to Lynn. Lynn, would you introduce yourself, please?

Anderson: Sure. I'm Lynn Anderson. I am a laboratory animal veterinarian by training. I have worked mostly in the pharmaceutical and contract research organization (CRO) side of the industry, and my last few jobs, I was also the Institutional Official for the organizations I worked for. I'm retired at the moment. About the last ten or 15 years, I had responsibility for individuals and programs that stretched around the United States and across the world,

everywhere from China to Germany, England, France, and United States. So, I've worked from home most of the time. About half the time, I was traveling. So, that's my background - dealing with virtual management. Thanks.

O'Neal: George, would you mind introducing yourself next?

Babcock: Sure. My name is George Babcock. I work at the College of Medicine at the University of Cincinnati. I did research in immunology and microbiology for 35 or so years. And then I stepped into just being IACUC chair. I've been that for 21 years. I'm also the vice chair of the IBC.

O'Neal: Thank you, George. And William, please.

Singleton: Hello. My name is William Singleton. Like Lynn Anderson, I am a lab animal veterinarian by training, and have worked in a lot of different environments, academic, pharmaceutical, CRO. Probably ten years ago, I started Animal Care Training Services (ACTS), and it was just exciting because I love this idea that we're talking about now. How do we function well together?

When I started ACTS, we wanted people to know how to do their work. And as we delved into that, we realized that there were more components to performing well - beyond just technical competence. So talking about teams is really exciting for me because that's what we're understanding, that you can't have good performance without having good technical confidence and also good behaviors in the organization to promote good performance overall. Talking about teams and how teams perform is exciting to me, particularly now as we're moving deeply into this time of social isolation and quarantine.

O'Neal: Thank you, thank you, all. Today, as we begin our conversation, one thing that's really important to consider is the functionality of a particular team. Does this team work in the capacity of administration? Are they animal technicians? Are they research teams or IACUC sorts of teams?

We've received quite a few questions from our participants. I'd like to read one of the contributions to you.

We are continuously losing team members to illness or other leave, furloughs, and other positions, and being told that nobody can be replaced due to negative budget. My biggest pandemic challenge as an administrator is operating at a level that has only been more and more short-staffed, with management that refuses to prioritize or reduce any workload, and seems to believe that sending some employees to work remotely has given us more hours in a day. Frustration and burnout are high, leaving us unable to cope adequately with normal workload, pandemic topics, or social unrest, either during or after work hours. Technology and practice have given us practical tools and solutions we need for remote work and multiple

locations. We have good workarounds for just about any task at this point. We simply do not have the time or mental resources for employees to feel any security anymore.

So, this is a really prime example of what some of our team members are experiencing. You know, the demands of the actual work itself, what's happening with the administration in terms of their ability to offer security in their jobs. With that, I'd really love to hand it off to William, and he will talk a little bit more about individual team needs. William, thank you.

Singleton: Sure. To get us started with utilizing the chat function, or even just talking, I'm curious how many of you are working in an administrative capacity or kind of a capacity where you're actually in the animal facility. If you could share that in the chat, that would be great. And also, while you're jotting down things in the chat box, we assume that most of you are working remotely, but some of you might actually be working in the office in the actual location of your job. If you could share that as well, that would be great.

I can see a lot of chats. Most people are working remotely, and most people are in administrative space. So let's think about where we are right now, for those of you that are working remotely and have been working remotely since we started this quarantine. Some people, kind of knew it was coming. I think for other folks, they went home on Friday and got a note on Sunday saying, from now on, we'll be working remotely until the situation changes.

And so, thinking about where we are now, how many of you were kind of prepared for this idea of working remotely? From a resources perspective, as well as getting the job done remotely. One of the luxuries I have with my team is that we are already remote. We do most everything virtually, all around the country. So it wasn't much of a challenge for us to stay virtual because that's how we do our work. But I know for a lot of folks, being virtual has its challenges.

I think there were times before the pandemic happened that many of us (who are now working remotely) kind of dreamed of a day when we could just work from home. And then you get the option to work from home for, like, six months - and it doesn't seem as happy as it seemed before. And so as we think about how we're getting into the work, how are we doing the work that we're supposed to do, some of the challenges that we face when we're at home. It's one thing for us to talk about - we're all working remotely. But the other thing that I think is a challenge for many - I'm curious as to how folks talk about the reality of WHY we're working from home. And we don't often talk about the pandemic from a human health crisis in our workspaces, because maybe we don't want to go there. But we're working from home because we're in a global health crisis. That presents a significant challenge to people. We're forced to, and we're geared toward, getting our work done. But now we have these challenges, not only what's happening in our world, but this global pandemic has also brought everything into the home.

So if you have kids, and your kids are young enough to have to be home schooled, maybe you are responsible now for also caring for them. And also making sure they're online when they're supposed to be or doing whatever asynchronous learning they have to do. All of a sudden, our

responsibilities, go up quite a bit. So I'm wondering if anyone wants to share some of their experience of how they've been able to manage the expectations of the job along with the expectations of being at home and taking care of those things that need to be done at home.

Participant: Our team has been incredibly flexible, and this has been something that's top-down, from the Vice President of Research, who has repeatedly affirmed that one of the best ways to get through the myriad of changes is to be extremely flexible. And so our team has really taken this to heart – we have different work hours and we've set some team norms, like schedule all your emails to be sent out during normal, business hours, even if you're working at 9:00 at night. There's this expectation and and understanding that not everybody can adhere to the 8:00 to 5:00 schedule. But that we as a team will get the job done.

Singleton: Thanks for sharing that. Has everyone been adhering to that practice of only emailing during scheduled work hours?

Participant: I think they have. That actually came out in a team meeting about maybe a week ago. So, we'll see. But I think everybody has been doing really good with that.

Singleton: That's good. I think one of the challenges of working remotely - it was hard for me when I first started - was just having some type of schedule. Some type of protection for your day. Because if you're working from home, you can work any time and all the time. So trying to find some barriers to allow you to have some - I don't want to say work-life balance - but have some perspective around how do you incorporate working from home into the other things you have to do. I think is really important. Have many people had a challenge with trying to learn when to time off, when to clap off? I see a participant shaking her head. You want to share what your challenge has been?

Participant: We sort of have respected the normal work hours and not really much has changed except now we do things with Zoom rather than in person. And the same people who would go home and work on documents, et cetera, because they had overwhelming positions to begin with, are still doing that. But people are very respectful about sending out emails, not too late, not too early. Unfortunately, the one side effect that we had is there wasn't a phone system set up, so our voicemails could be forwarded to our email. So if you call anyone back, they have your cell phone number. Unfortunately, your researchers may not respect that. Like, Sunday, I was getting text messages from somebody at 11:00 p.m. You know, that can't be helped.

Singleton: That is unfortunate. Everyone has to have an understanding of the system. Thank you for sharing that, participant. Along those lines, how has your organizations been able to stay connected? What sources of communication works for you? Email? Phone? Someone mentioned Zoom. We're using Zoom now. What are the tools that you're using to stay connected for work issues?

Participant: We rely heavily on Teams. Right before COVID, our organization had updated everyone's desktops to have Teams and it was very timely, and so we all had a Teams setup and

we had groups - so we were familiar with it to begin with. We were kind of spread out. We weren't all in one building. We were spread out throughout our large city and metropolitan area. So we had already become familiar with having to reach out. So that's been really helpful. It's great because you can actually call people on Teams. They pop up. It's almost like being right next to them.

Singleton: That's really awesome. Now that you have all those extra cell phone numbers, you can call somebody at 10:00 at night. [laughter] Anyone else want to share some of the ways in which they've used to communicate which has worked?

Jarrell: At Mass General, we gravitated to email. In the beginning of the pandemic, email was king. It was the default. We've also gravitated to Zoom. We all have Zoom fatigue now. But, we conducted a national survey through AALAS back in August to find out what were some of the dissatisfiers of staff and communication, and 24% of the workforce, most of the people in that 24% that responded were from the front lines. They responded that they did not like to be communicated with by email. They felt that leadership was using email as a replacement for leadership. So while the leadership respondents to the national survey said that that was our default method of communicating, that email worked for them, the frontline staff felt that it was not the right -- that's not the way they wanted to consume information. They much more preferred something face-to-face, number one, and in replacement of face-to-face, something that leadership would give them a personal touch and email was not it.

Singleton: Thanks for sharing that. I think it's like a tale of two worlds. For those working administratively - the world is really different for essential workers who are actually in the facility. And so I can certainly see that. That's a real challenge and I hope that as we have these conversations, those of us who are in executive and administrative roles understand that people still need those touch points. And as much as we are using our method of communication, whether Zoom, email, or texting is what we have to do, there are still those people who are in the facility who might not have access as we who are in our office at home have access. If you're an administrative team and everyone is at home, you pop in on a Zoom call every day at noon, that's awesome. How do you capture that same need for your care stuff who are in multiple rooms, multiple buildings across the city.

Silk: A participant says maybe your facility can get the Jabber app to link your work phone to your cell phone. Or when calling back, you can do star-67 to block your number. Of course, they may ignore the call if they don't know who it is.

Singleton: Those are some helpful ideas. In response to your earlier question, we were seeing a preponderance of administrators working from home. Many people having experience with split schedules, some were spending some time in the facility and some time at home. You're communicating using Zoom, Teams, Skype, email, Microsoft Teams. Everybody's using all kinds of things.

O'Neal: I would like to bring up a few examples from Jen, one of our faculty colleagues who is on our team but is not able to attend today. Jen talked about a number of different scenarios where once a week, she would have a one-on-one with her employees on her team. When they had weekly meetings, everyone was required to show their faces so everyone could kind of check in with each other. I've been part of Teams where I had to have a buddy and check in on this person just to check in on their well-being. Just to see how they're doing. Not even about work, but how are things going, how is the workload, how is the balance between what you need to negotiate with your home life and what you need to negotiate with your work life, how is that going? So these are the sorts of ways that other institutions have really tried to check in on their employees and on their team members, just to make sure everyone's hanging in there and getting the support they need to do well in their environment. That's another example.

Silk: A participant tells us that her institution is stressing the need to turn on cameras, so body language is visible.

Another participant mentions - my close colleague and I use Google Hangouts to facilitate quick conversations like we would during the day in person. With regard to Zoom, our institution actually stressed the acceptance of video off, since not everyone has a house they'd be comfortable sharing with others, or they have children and parents, et cetera, that they're caring for.

You can see I have all of you in my art studio. And I love having you here, but yes, I see your point.

Singleton: This whole idea of trying to stay connected, as best we can, is really important. Every institution is going to have our own particular concerns about how we do that. As we think - big picture - around teams, the important thing for all of us to remember is that we are still human beings who crave human connection, even though we are in a period of quarantine. So, what can we do to maintain those connections? And ultimately, so that the work can go on, like we want it to, so that all of those connections help perform better, but also just to feel better about the world that we live in. There's a lot of stress in the world right now, whether it's the pandemic or social unrest, an election coming up that seems like it could be potentially crazy. All these things are stressors in our lives that impact how we do our work. And so I think as real and connected as we can stay with each other, the better we can at some point, focus, put our head down, and do the thing that's important right in front of us.

Silk: Donna has a good community. Can you unmute and tell us about it, please, Donna?

Jarrell: Hi, everybody, sure. I'm Donna Jarrell at Mass General Hospital, and one of the things that I noticed early on is that the staff that were working remote - and that was a requirement to put as many people as we could remote - experienced very different stresses than the people who were on-site. You could hear the stress in the communications and addressing them required very different answers. And so it was also obvious when we started bringing

people back on-site that that different experiences of having been on-site and coming back on-site was another phase of stress that the people who had been on-site all the time didn't recognize. Had no appreciation for. It was important, as a director, to try to get to a new normal as quickly as possible because every time you did that, the teams vibrated, there was stress. So that was just something I picked up that I thought I would share.

Singleton: Did those folks who were off-site understand the stressors of those folks who were on-site?

Jarrell: After they had to come on-site, absolutely. And for the people who may have transitioned to be off-site a little more, like myself, my first 90 to 100-something days was on-site every single day until we knew where we were. And then my off-site stress was delayed, like, how do I set up my office? How do I -- all these things that you were talking about, that each time you do that, you create that shift. And so getting to a steady state, and even the balance between work and life and school and all of that has to be pretty stable once it's in place because shifting it becomes really difficult for the individuals.

Singleton: Thank you, everyone, for your comments and participation. I think it's a great start to our conversation. I want to move it over to George now and let him share a few ideas as well.

Babcock: Thank you, William. I'm going to cover a few things that Ivonne touched on a little bit. I'm going to expand more on the interactions of online meetings. I'll talk a little bit about how we're doing it now. We're mostly remote. All the administrative staff is remote. The clinical staff is remote part-time. Our veterinarians are not all there at the same time. So we have meetings remotely with them too, when they're remote. They're on sort of a hybrid system.

Something I'll cover a little later is fatigue doing meetings, but I think some things we can do from the beginning to help prevent that is -- I like to start my meetings, or end meetings, with some chitchat. Like, some of you who came in early saw the faculty chitchatting. I think it's good to relax the group to not jump right into a rigid schedule. Just my opinion. And I'd certainly like to see what you people think. I think once that's going, then you can go into your schedule.

And I also think we have to be careful, particularly in close working teams of only doing business by meetings. You can also do some social things by meetings. I personally like to see people's faces. Not everybody agrees with that. But I like to see their faces. I also do some teaching with teams, and we require that the students show their faces. Some of that's for attendance purposes, but still, I like seeing them and being able to communicate. I think that somebody mentioned flexibility. And others mentioned privacy. I think there's a place for both. And I'd like to see what people think of that.

Flexibility is nice in that you can dress how you want to, as long as from chest-up you're presentable. Then again, to get the whole team together, you like a set time. Does everybody have set time for their meetings? Or do people have meetings that have flexibility? Or both? Both, I see. I think that's a great idea. I think maybe if you have a lighter meeting once a week - a problem or a thing that you must do - is when do you have your meetings, okay? Not the flexible ones, but the set ones. Beginning of the week, the end of the week, the middle of the week? And I'd like to see what you say, and I'll give you an opinion of how I think that may work out better doing it certain ways.

Participant, I love that comment. I think that's something that's really good - to play games to relax. Another thing that I think is perfectly okay is to have happy hours occasionally. Maybe more toward the end of the day. [laughter] Another participant said we check to see how. everybody's weekend went. One group has their meeting in the middle of the day. I think it's pretty important, if you can, to start the week with a meeting on Monday. To set the tone for the week. And maybe have one of your more formal meetings with a set agenda. This is what our goals are for this week. And then as the week goes on, maybe have some more flexibility, like those of you who are doing X can update the teams who need to know in the middle of the week or the end of the week. I think a stress relief meeting is really good at the end of the week, particularly Friday, if you work on Friday. That can really help things. Here's a participant that has a staff meeting on Monday. Another that's middle. So there's some variability. But I really think Monday would help.

One thing that has come up is one very big disadvantage to doing certain things by these meetings. That is, how do you discuss something with an individual employee which may be a little touchy? I think that's very important not to do it in front of a group. Sometimes you need to have a one-on-one meeting. You can do that by phone, but I think Zoom works well, too, or Teams or WebEx or something like that, because you can see their face. Sometimes facial expressions, particularly if it's something that's either very important, or maybe some sort of discipline, it's important to see how somebody's taking it. So you maybe can adjust your approach depending on what you see. Phones have a tendency to make us a little monotone. I don't think you always get a feel for the way the person is feeling. But I think it's very important not to discuss something that only one individual needs on a team meeting. Sometimes if you only have it once a week, you get into that. I don't think that's the best way of doing it.

Silk: Sometimes phones are hard for people when English isn't their first language.

Babcock: Definitely. With facial, sometimes you can figure it out just by their facial expressions and sort of doing a little bit of lip reading. On the phone, it's absolutely impossible.

What about the length of your meetings? Do you have a set time? If so, what is it?

Participant. We don't let any of our meetings go over an hour. Our leadership has been very clear about the need to stick to a schedule and not run over because it's really easy to do.

But also to shoot for smaller meetings in more digestible chunks, like half an hour, really making sure that we adhere to those guidelines so that we avoid Zoom fatigue.

O'Neal: One thing that I have found, I have weekly meetings, and most recently, they started with a prompt for what sitcom character would you like to have dinner with and why? And so, of course, I picked Niles from "Frasier" because who wouldn't pick Niles from "Frasier"? I just think he's amazing. That was my choice. Hearing everyone's options got us going and it was a good start to the Monday meeting.

Babcock: Most people - there's one two-hour weekly meeting. I'm excluding IACUC meetings, because usually there is a fixed amount of business that you have to go through. You'd like to keep them short, but, if you've got 30 protocols to discuss, you're not going to get through in a short time. I think it's really important not to go too long. If the meeting is not progressing, if you can get it done in 30 minutes, and it's scheduled for an hour, quit. You don't need to fill up the time you've set if you're not discussing anything of importance.

Now, if you want to relax people, that's good, too. I have a lot of meetings. Seven or eight Zoom meetings a week. Some of them, they follow that time no matter what. I'm on our faculty Senate, and the meetings are an hour and a half. It's always an hour and a half, whether you have 15 minutes worth of business or two hours they rush through, they're going to use up that time. I really hate going to those, or tuning in to those, because they're just not productive for most of them. I think the *why* is important. It's not so much the length, but you have a reason. You need that time to get through your business. If you don't need it, quit, or set the time shorter if you're regularly doing 30 minutes.

The last thing I'm going to suggest -- some people have pretty strict conventions on being very formal - I won't say dressed up, but not very relaxed. And other people don't care, as long as you're there. That's really your choice. Some would argue that it's more productive and professional to look a certain way. And I can see that point of view. Luckily, none of the ones I'm in have that, even with the president of the university, who has a meeting once a month. He will be in a T-shirt.

Silk: George, we're all wondering if you're wearing golf pants. [laughter]

Babcock: No.

Silk: Are you wearing shorts with flamingos or something?

Babcock: I usually wear shorts, but it's cool here today, so I have jeans on.

Silk: One of the requirements of ICARE is that all faculty wear pants. [laughter]

Singleton: Don't stand up, please. We'll take your word for it. [laughter]

Babcock: Well, not to worry. A little later, I'll discuss a very important thing that I'm feeling - fatigue with the meetings. There are studies on ways to relieve meeting fatigue. So I'll turn it over to Lynn, now.

Anderson: Yes. Thanks, George. I have a question that was submitted ahead of time, so I'm just going to read it. This person said that they *have challenges related to having to do atypical work hours due to working remotely. And knowing how to extend deadlines and how to ask federal agencies or institutional leadership for guidance on what to do in these situations.* So there's really kind of three questions there.

So, challenges related to having to do atypical work hours due to working remotely. We've talked about that quite a bit here and talked about the importance of being flexible. One of the things that I was going to comment on is the importance of getting up and moving around as much as possible. I say that because I didn't do that when I was working remotely for so many years. It's just not healthy. Many people set their meetings for only 50 minutes instead of an hour so they do have that opportunity to get up and move around in between meetings.

We've talked a lot about process in the last half-hour, 45 minutes, I would focus more on outcomes than on process. There are a number of ways to get work done, and what we should be looking at is the results of the work that's being expected, more so than worrying about are we doing it at 2:00 in the afternoon or 10:00 in the morning or in the evening. How are you doing it? It's just really important.

And then the other point I wanted to make, and I think William touched on this, is the importance of being disciplined. Disciplining yourself to make sure that you do have that time to get up, move around, call a friend, do things all day long that will help to relieve some of the stressors that are involved and relieving the Zoom fatigue that's been mentioned.

The other part of this question was how to ask federal agencies or institutional leadership for guidance on what to do in these situations. I could let the folks from USDA and OLAW speak for themselves if they'd like to, but I can assure you that they're very approachable. They really want to help. And so please don't hesitate to give them a call if you have questions. As for your institutional leadership, I think that depends. Every institution is a little different and you just have to get a feel for when the time is right to try to ask for guidance. Any other questions?

Silk: We have some comments that some people are getting better attendance at Zoom meetings than they do for their normal time meetings. They're getting better attendance than they used to.

Anderson: Oh, in a normal setting.

Babcock: I think that's typical, because you don't have the distraction of having to run down the hall or to an animal room or something. You've got a set time and as long as your kids or pets aren't going haywire, you can attend the meeting.

Jarrell: I found my Senior VP Institutional Official is making himself more available. It got to the point where we could meet often more frequently, and I think we could appreciate the decision-making a lot better based on the situation we were in at the time. So instead of waiting for the leadership to somehow figure out all the components of what was needed, as you can imagine, we have our hospital side of Mass General, we had our research side, and all of the decision-makers came together frequently and put out frequent communication. So even though there was this overkill of emails, you could always refer back to that if you wanted to know the most recent instructions or direction or position of the administration. And we are still in this. I had to go ask to have time available, but immediately, it was made available. So, don't be afraid.

Anderson: There's some really good comments and suggestions here for how to do things. I really appreciate that from the team here. Ivonne, back to you.

O'Neal: Thank you so much, Lynn, George, and William. People have been asking about some team activities and ways to check in with teammates at the beginning of meetings or a way to summarize at the end. And we just want to talk about a few examples that many have brought to the table. I talked to you a little bit about the idea of sharing who you wanted to have dinner with from your favorite sitcom, as well as team-building games, like *Two Truths and a Lie*, *the Lockdown Edition*.

My sister actually is part of a team where they had a chef create a meal with them on Zoom where everyone bought the ingredients ahead of time and they prepared this meal together with the leadership of this chef, and they all had a meal together on Zoom. She said it was a really fun experience just to have everyone be in everyone's kitchen and just have a glass of wine and prepare a meal together.

Silk: I wonder if the people here who are at universities would have unique talents among their colleagues that could provide entertainment. The universities might not hire a chef, but they might have a hospitality school that could do something similar.

O'Neal: Sure, absolutely there are many arts departments and performing arts divisions that would love to be a part of these sorts of exercises and just engage. There are partnerships there that can certainly be developed. I'm doing work with the Minnesota Opera right now, and the way they're doing that sort of thing is really engaging with the community in unique ways that they haven't had an opportunity to do before. They were so used to attending to their public in a particular way. Now they really need to be creative and innovative in a way that they can meet the artistic needs of their community in new and innovative ways. They're

inviting them to singalongs. They're inviting them to participate in talk-backs with each other as artists. Ways that they didn't have opportunities to engage before.

Now, in terms of some of the potential reasons for the breakdowns in communication, we've heard from other participants that some of the reasons could be due to urgent requests and the reduction of mental and physical bandwidths due to the remote working environment while taking care of family members. And not being able to interact with friends and family and loved ones and seeing yourself in the news or social media being negatively impacted by the pandemic or social unrest.

One thing we've also been hearing from participants is about the lack of understanding or the feeling of unfairness, of making special allowances for those that are at home with younger children that may need to take care of the needs of the younger children, while those that may be on-site may not have the same sorts of allowances. It seems to be breeding resentment in teams. They aren't feeling as united because it feels like some people are getting special allowances when others aren't. Has anyone had any experience with that and what have you done about that? Is that cropping up anywhere?

Silk: I remember Jen (who is not with us today) told us at UCLA, their animal therapy team provided entertainment for her animal-loving group, and they have primarily dogs. But I looked on their website and they also have a small therapy horse and also a gerbil, and she said they joined her meeting on a Friday afternoon, and it was the most wonderful sendoff into the weekend.

We're not seeing anything on the chat in answer to your question, but maybe somebody would like to unmute and talk about how to present an equitable accommodation of people's needs.

Participant: For us, it's been really interesting, because the institution had an institutional mindset that working from home was not a possibility, that if people were home, they weren't working, and that if you weren't in the same area to where you could put eyes on them, they weren't going to be doing anything. COVID has been an enormous change in attitude because all of a sudden, they see that people actually can be productive from home. The business of the institution is still continuing. And now, all of a sudden, we have this huge sea change where they're actually thinking about not building new buildings, because they can have people work from home and they can save money by not building new office spaces. So that's really, really just been incredibly interesting. And so now they are giving us really great tools to be able to work from home. Unfortunately, I'm one of those people living very remotely, so I have very bad internet. So you have the challenges there. But it's interesting, there is still a fair amount of divergence across the institution as to expectations. You know, can you still work from home. It's a little bit safer. Should we be going in? Our VPR has been very accommodating, especially accommodating of our parents. But we're not hearing that all across the institutions. So I think we're just incredibly lucky with our VPR understanding that parents don't have

school, in some cases they have to take care of their kids. It's been a really interesting mixed bag.

Silk: William mentions he's seen some resentments between essential and nonessential staff. I hate that terminology, don't you, William?

Singleton: I do. I think it lends itself to the same comment you made about people who have kids versus those who don't have kids. These distinctions that we make. They're not often fair and not equitable. So I think there are a lot of challenges that we're experiencing.

O'Neal: As we think about the culture of our institutions and the way in which we have communicated pre-pandemic, some of us have been very private about our personal lives and whether or not we had family, and if we talked about our home life. So it's not natural to all of a sudden begin talking about that and begin sharing those sorts of details with our supervisors or others about the demands of our particular home situation. So there's something about creating an atmosphere of welcome when it comes to these sorts of new pieces of information that we have not shared quite so freely until this point. So maybe it's something to think about in terms of another way of opening the door for communication in an area that we have not really nurtured before. How do we open the door to let people know that we do want to hear about their well-being and what struggles they're experiencing in their home life, which will affect how they're performing in the workplace.   It's something to think about -- we're all whole people - it's not just separate work and separate family. We're one person and we need to know how to make it work effectively.

Silk: We have a number of comments, people saying that they're hearing about this hostility among other groups, but not among their own. And I think that is really a tribute to our community. We know that these are caring people, and I think we're seeing the result of the effort that all of you put in to build your teams and collaborative relationships. You are benefiting from that. Some people are mentioning some good things that their institutional leadership did. They have hero T-shirts to wear on Fridays. Here people are after my own heart - they get free ice cream on Fridays. Discussions about how to continue working from home after the pandemic. Important to recognize the stresses. I mean, both sides. Mixed messages between the upper leadership and local leadership. They don't always agree. And we have groups that send disclaimers for all meeting invites saying we understand and welcome COVID hair, grooming challenges, children. We just want to see you.

O'Neal: I love that. That's fantastic. Another challenge that has been raised is public transportation. Has that been an issue for any members of your teams? Getting to work? On our previous call, we had people talking about how they had access to parking spaces that were closer and free during this time, and that really facilitated easier access to the workplace, certainly during COVID. Anyone else? How are you dealing with those sorts of issues? Access to the workplace and just getting there. How have you handled it?

Participant: I've been taking the subway, which has been fine, but I was not traveling at the height of the initial pandemic outbreak. But I do know that our animal facilities people were given leave to use Uber, et cetera, in our very large metropolitan area. And that they can get reimbursed because there was concern that people would come into contact and become infected. So to keep people safer, but also make it less stressful for them, they were given different options, they were given reimbursement for parking, if they chose to drive in. I think if memory serves, at one point, we had hotel arrangements that we normally use for patients, that they were given a discount of some sort. But I'm not 100% sure on that.

O'Neal: Amazing, amazing. Thank you. Yes, we see here from another participant that parking for employees was free and public transportation was low rider volume, but some schedules were cut back, it didn't seem to be a problem. Excellent. The messaging of this, actually it's beyond just the access, right? It is about the administration showing the employees that they care. There's something about sharing that with each other and knowing what some of these possibilities are. But the messaging to the employees is so important, that we are thinking about these details on your behalf. We want to make sure that you feel safe. We want to make sure that you have the access that you need to meet these responsibilities that you have, and that we're adding to your plate at this point, honestly. So that's really important. Donna says that they also provided PPE and that staff would wear them when commuting in and going home. For Donna's organization, this was the main transportation issue. But where this participant is, the issues was shuttles with no free parking

Participant: I'll just say that it's pretty darn hot here in our state, and nobody wants to walk a couple miles in the summertime, and we have two different locations. We also have to get screened to enter a building. Some of our locations, they shut off the screeners at 2:00 p.m. So if you want to come into the vivarium from a different building, you have to go a mile and a half away to get screened before you come in, and you have to get screened again before you go back to your building, and if you don't get screened, they shut your badge off for a month. It's a cancer center, so they're very concerned. Even though they built walls between the research facility and the hospital, they're very concerned about screening, so it's very challenging.

Babcock: I used to work there. Some of the remote lots flood, too.

Jarrell: At Mass General, we did something very similar, in that all of the research buildings that were affiliated in any way with a clinical area, access was restricted and everybody had to go through a common area, and it did create some real challenges for people who might be moving from one animal facility to another. Also we had researchers who needed to move their animals for terminal procedures, because they still had to go through these areas. When we tried to express the concern that we were having to the hospital administration, they considered it, but accepted that the risk of controlling all access was more important. So our researchers had to adapt to that situation.

Babcock: It's not the screening - I think that's pretty typical. It was cutting it off at 2:00. We ran ours 24 hours. In order to have enough screeners initially, they required each department to

provide volunteers, either away from their administrative duties or away from their research activities to serve as screeners, in order to allow our investigators back on campus. Our IACUC office coordinated the distribution of facemasks to the research facilities when we came back on because they were remote and were willing to do that. So the IACUC office was actually a key contributor to safety of the whole institute. A nice little kudos there. Protect the animals and the people who have to use the animals, right?

One thing I want to mention before I do that is that when we've done the session before, we've had the honor of having one of my friends do a guided meditation with us. And it has been a really amazing experience. It's an option to really take us to another place mentally and emotionally. Those of us that participated felt refreshed and felt like we were in another place for a little while on a mental vacation and that we could come back and really be renewed in the work that we were doing together. I'm sad that she couldn't be with here with us today. She had a conflict.

Silk: That meditation is in the Meeting Reports for the earlier ICARE Dialogue on August 20 and September 16, 2020. The Meeting Reports are in the ICARE website (https://olaw.nih.gov/education/icare-interagency), which is on the OLAW website.

O'Neal: You will see the specifics of the entire meditation. It's something you can work into your own meetings yourself.

Anderson: What impressed me greatly about Lynette's guided meditation is how short it was. It was like night and day in terms of my relaxation. It's not something that takes a tremendous amount of time, and I think that's important when time is so precious right now. Thanks.

O'Neal: So with that, I'd love to hand it over to George.

Babcock: I'm going to talk about meeting fatigue or Zoom fatigue. First, I want to share some of the things we know, reasons for why it happens, and then we can discuss it in more depth in a minute. We all know that after a Zoom meeting, most of us - I am - are drained. Probably more so than meetings in person. And one of the things that's been found is that you have to focus much more intently during one of these video meetings. If you're in a conference or a classroom and you miss something, you say, hey, William, what was that? You can't do that when you're like this. You have to focus, or you have to stop the meeting essentially to ask your question. You have to focus more intently than we normally do. We also have to focus generally straight ahead at the camera. You may actually stretch a little bit more when you're at home or in your office, not on a video. In real life, it just isn't the way you do things. You don't talk to people looking at them head-on right in the eye on a camera. So that causes fatigue.

There are some ways to reduce it. Ivonne mentioned meditation is very helpful. We did that in one of the sessions. And it was really relaxing. We had a leader, a helper. A lot of cases, you'd

have to do meditation yourself, but that's doable. But you've got this intense focus, but we still try to multi-task. Don't do that. That puts a tremendous strain on our brain to try to answer email while we're looking at this, or out of the corner of your eye, see the kid running across the room. You've got to be in an area where you can focus on the meeting. Also, try to change things up a little bit. The leader of the meeting can do that. If you're the leader, don't make it too repetitious. Change the order. Do a little stretching. You can say - okay, in a few minutes, we're going to take a break, get up, stretch. In certain circumstances, it's best to try to replace the meeting with something else, if you can. We've already heard the text, email, et cetera. That doesn't always work for everything, but you don't have to always use video. So use the other things.

As I mentioned also, try to make some social events, as Ivonne mentioned. Do something else during them. And that makes it very relaxing. And we'll get rid of the fatigue, or reduce it. Does anybody have any other things that they regularly do?

Singleton: I think for us, one of the things that fatigued us is when we had no agenda and no actionable items that came out of the meeting. What's your agenda and what are you going to do after the meeting? People get frustrated. Like another meeting with just blah blah blah. So having something concrete around your meeting is helpful.

Babcock: That's a very good idea. Anything that changes it up a little bit really helps. For those of you that do a lot of them, you can do five or six a week and they're exactly the same. Just the same faces. They're different faces, we know each other, and we see the participants, and that I think really helps a lot, at least it helps me.

Anybody else have anything else that they can think of? One stressor that a lot of us are feeling, I include myself in this, is uncertainty. In March, we were told we would be going remote. And it would probably last until July. In July, we were told it would last to September. In September, we heard, we're not going to do anything until 2021. They keep pushing it back. But they don't tell you this until right before it actually kicks in. We didn't know we weren't going to stay remote in July until July. So they set this deadline up and then tell you it changed. So people are getting sort of antsy.

We had furloughs at my place and that made people very uncomfortable. It was in lieu of layoffs, which is helpful, but you don't get paid for furloughs, at least we didn't. And nobody knew when it was coming for them. It would appear in your email, starting July 15th through July 27th, you're on furlough. You can't work and you're not getting any money. So it was like, really? And in my case, in a lot of your cases, the IACUC and the administration has to run. So I had to work during my furlough, which they told me was a no-no, but I did anyway. But didn't get paid. People are starting to worry about this.

Miscommunication is something that I've heard from several people. You get a message from quite a bit higher up. People interpret it completely different, and it's the same message. It's like, oh, my God, I'm losing my job. The furloughs caused that. People thought that meant they

were getting fired. A lot of stress until they realized, no, they're just not getting paid for a week, which is not fun, but it's not the same as getting fired. Have any of you experienced anything like that?

Participant: We have been notified that there might be some reorganizations, et cetera, long-term because we lost a lot of patient income. So the institution has -- we're a private medical and research institution. It's been hinted at that benefits might get cut, a hiring freeze. People are worried about it - nobody said anybody's going to be laid off or fired, but when you start hearing those things, you start to be worried and you hear about other institutions where people are laid off and it's very stressful.

Babcock: That's super stressful. That's exactly what I was talking about. Because they say, we could, we might, we may. I mean, you don't want to hear it's going to, but at least you can plan on getting on with your life. Oh, we might reduce your department. And that's what we hear. Might, may. I think that's terribly stressful. Maybe Ivonne has tips for how to reduce that. I see that as the most stressful thing I see, the lack of direct communication from those above.

O'Neal: One thing I remember Jen saying is that something she's done with her staff is to unpack some of those emails from senior administration with her staff, to really help talk them through some of the communication she's receiving. And share the knowledge that she has about what's happening. It really puts their mind at ease, so if there's a way to somehow share what you know with your staff, in a way that at least everyone is in the same boat, it may be helpful. I don't want to say misery loves company, but it does help if we're able to somehow help alleviate each other's anxiety about those sorts of issues.

Babcock: Somebody in their group announced they weren't getting merit raises, and somebody interpreted that to mean they weren't going to get paid. Everybody heard they weren't getting a merit increase, and one person in the group thought, we're not going to get paid! That's totally different. But people interpret things differently, so that was a good idea. I remember that now. Jen said she goes over all the messages. Most of us aren't in a position to go over with everybody we work with, which is a problem. You can deal with your group, but it would be nice if they'd make the messages a little clearer.

Silk: A participant tells us her department has a monthly meeting and the director has a rumor mill time where she opens the floor to discuss rumors that are floating around. Other people are mentioning that this sounds like a good idea.

Babcock: That's a great idea. I've heard more rumors during this pandemic than ever before.

Silk: Some people are using walking treadmill desks to stay more engaged. Other people really like that idea. One of our faculty members has a walking treadmill desk and it means she bounces when we're talking.

Babcock: And you can tell when she's going to talk because she stops.

Silk: (From the chat.) And not knowing when and if we will return, which is not discussed as much now. And the financial state of the university and the possible impacts to us all.

I think that it's not a unique problem. The whole society is chaotic now, and nobody has enough information to make predictions. It's certainly terrifying not to know if your job is stable. It's in a more chaotic context, which I think there are no firm parameters to anything at the moment.

Babcock: A lot of businesses are worse off than universities. Unless you work for Amazon, they're going gangbusters. [laughter]

Silk: Yeah. And they're putting small businesses out of business. And our friends that work in the restaurant industry and the hospitality industry are facing hard times. ICARE is struggling to know when and if we can reschedule our face-to-face meetings. We miss teaching and learning from you guys in person. And we don't know how to reschedule. The government changes the rules as they need to, as they should. So I don't think we particularly find fault with university administrations. It's a problem of the whole society right now.

Babcock: I think what you just said about face-to-face ties onto what the participants said. It's great that they understand the importance of remote, how people can work, maybe even better. I hope too many places don't overreact and start getting rid of offices, getting rid of spaces, because certain things, I think, are just done better face-to-face. I just don't think I would be comfortable being totally remote. I think certain individuals can do it, but to have a whole remote group that never comes back, I think -- they will turn over and you won't get to know these people. There will be a whole new group that you work with closely and never know.

I'm going to end with one last thing. Relating to meetings remotely or whatever. Not everything is urgent. Like the 11:00 emails. We've got to lighten up on things like that. There are certain things, like Lynn's daughter may be having a baby, and that's urgent. But other things don't need to get done now. And because you can get in touch with somebody just like that remotely doesn't mean you should, if it's really not urgent. Thank you.

Singleton: There are a couple things that I wanted to talk about, but I don't want to go over our time. I'll be really fast. One of the things that have challenged people is just having the resources to work remotely. Some of you talked about getting good internet connection. Some of you have had to think about - where in my house am I going to set up an office? I remember, I was talking to my wife about a year or two ago, and she was like, you know, I really feel like I need an office in the house. And I made the dumb remark of, you don't need an office in the house, you go to work every day, why do you need an office in the house? I will never live that down. Now she has an office in the house. [laughter] I think how we creatively

move our space around so that we can function and perform in those spaces is really important.

There was a comment about vacation, taking time off. And how that's going to work for everyone is completely different, based on your home situation, based on your work expectations and your staffing at work. But I'd encourage all of you to find meaning. Ways to take a break from work. Even if it's just for a weekend. Just turn work off, because our brain has so much processing of so much information. Giving it a break periodically is real helpful. I would try to see if you can figure out how to squeeze in a little vacation time where you kind of completely unwind and be in a different moment than the moment you're in when you're at work.

The last point was about equitability of staffing, and particularly -- many people who are working administratively, I don't know if you're having high turnover. A lot of administrative people aren't leaving and switching around jobs, but I've seen a lot of veterinarians moving from different jobs. So creating a little bit of chaos when they leave, because not every institution is hiring. So when you're on a workflow that's kind of half on, half off, it does create some dynamics to the working space.

So those are the three things. Making sure you have the resources necessary. Take some time off. Think about how you are equitably assigning work to each other.

Ivonne, I don't know if you're ready to do an activity, but I would be super curious if everyone -- like, if you could have dinner with a sitcom character, who would it be? So if you could pop in the chat box, what would that be? I'd be really curious. I don't see anything going in there.

Anderson: [reading chat] Sheldon, Big Bang Theory. Larry David.

Singleton: [reading chat] Herman Munster. Ted Lasso, I don't know who that is. All those people responding are people who don't watch TV, they're focused on the work. I get it. No judgment. I just wanted to turn back over to you.

O'Neal: Actually, we have Lynn, now.

Anderson: Recognition of both individuals and team accomplishments is a really important thing, especially now. You need to celebrate. It could be personal accomplishments, like having a grandchild born, or it could be important things related the work. If you've had, for example - and I know the site visits and so forth, audits are being done remotely as well. But celebrate when you have an accomplishment that's important to share with the whole team. One of the things I wanted to mention, too, is keep in touch with your customers during this time. Your customers being the research staff. See what you can do. Make sure that they're feeling satisfied. Ask for input and respond to it. So those are my little tips for this. Because we are getting close to ending time. So, Ivonne, I'll turn it back over to you.

O'Neal: Thank you, Lynn. As we wind down this part of the session today, I wanted to ask if anyone has any questions or any comments before we take our break. You have been so generous with your comments and your participation. We're just so happy that you were here, and we'd love to hear if you'd have some specific questions about working in teams.

Participant: I think a challenge that many of us are seeing as staff is onboarding during the pandemic, remote interviews, gleaning the information you need to evaluate whether the person is fit for your team or not. So just curious what everybody is doing to glean that information during these remote-type interviews.

O'Neal: That's a really good question, because you don't have those cues that you have when you're sitting face-to-face with someone. I would love to hear what people have to say. That's an interesting challenge. And we are having to staff up differently. Does anyone have any feedback?

Participant: We're actively recruiting for a veterinarian right now, so we probably are in the similar boat. And we are having to do the interview remotely via Zoom. We actually had an experience when we were looking for our residents where we had to interview a resident candidate remotely, so right off the bat, our veterinary staff was familiar with the technology and how it would look. We tried to interview for attributes that will fit our culture, so I think we can still ask our questions and determine that.

The real big challenge has been trying to show the candidate our program, which is very complex, very big, and are they willing to come in, do we have to do that virtually with a camera. All of that is part of what we're having to adapt because we don't have any local candidates in our area right now. I mean, we have some, but we also have candidates that are not in the area. And so even how willing are they to move? There's just a lot of things around hiring that are still up in the air. But we do ask a lot of situational questions, so we feel like we can still interview remotely. But what does the person think they're getting into?

O'Neal: That's tricky. I'm going through that myself in terms of hiring. It's an interesting predicament. And though you're relying on references in a whole different way during this time, but that's situational. There are contextual type of questions. Like, this is what the work looks like. This is the percentage of time that this position requires. The usual sorts of things take on a whole different meaning right now. Everything's different. We have to figure out the best way to make those sorts of decisions. The markers have changed. Like, what are those things that we need to rely on to make the answer to make those big decisions? I wish I had an answer for you, participant.

Babcock: I think this is hard for the person interviewing, too. I don't think they're going to be as comfortable asking a lot of questions when they can't see you, other than a little box.

O'Neal: The participant is right. Maybe more difficult for the candidate to get a good feel for the program. You haven't met the team. Even though you tried to organize those types of

Zoom meetings also, it's tricky. You don't see their interactions together and how they get along as a team. That's really important for the candidate.

Participant: I was going to say too that, in general, the organization of our interview often involves small meetings with different groups. Some one-on-one, some maybe two or three with the candidate. And you get a different perception of the person and they become more relaxed. Even if you set up a bunch of separate Zoom meetings, you're still not going to get that kind of interaction.

O'Neal: True. Well, I know it's time for us to wrap up, and I wanted to thank you all so much for your time today. And just sharing your experiences about your teams.