

Specialty Nurse in Nutrition

Proper nutrition is an important factor in the health and well-being of companion animals. It's particularly important when an animal is ill and hospitalized. VHUP's patients are offered nutritional services, though the emphasis has been on the critically ill in the ICU.

The nutrition service is about to expand its scope, thanks to a two-year grant by Ralston Purina Pet Foods that supports the position of a nutritional nurse at the hospital. "These funds allowed us to hire Charlotte Higgins as a nurse practitioner with a specialty in nutrition," said Dr. Kathy Michel, assistant professor of nutrition. "Charlotte is only the second nurse with this position, the other is at the veterinary college at The Ohio State University. This new position will provide more comprehensive nutritional support to patients in the hospital."

Higgins will be working closely with clinicians and nurses to identify animals in the hospital that need nutritional support, not only critically ill patients, but also patients in the wards. She will help clinicians and nurses select the proper food for patients with special needs and guide them through the bewildering selection of specialty foods for various medical conditions. How much to feed is often a puzzle, here the nutrition nurse will help by calculating the caloric needs of the patient and determine the quantities necessary to meet these needs.

Another duty will be to guide the long term nutrition management of patients and to be available to owners once the dog or cat is home. "Charlotte will prepare sample packets of food that are sent home with the animal," explained Dr. Michel. "People then can determine which food the dog or cat likes best. That way they don't have to buy large bags and then have left-overs that the pet won't eat."


Higgins will be available for nutrition counseling for patients that are not hospitalized but are seen in the clinics during appointments. Often such sessions are needed because the pet is overweight and this aggravates a condition or disease process. She can then develop a reduction diet or a special diet and follow up with the client periodically.

Higgins is in training now. She attends Dr. Michel's lectures alongside the veterinary students. She accompanies Dr. Michel on rounds and reads a lot on the subject of dog and cat nutrition, not just for healthy animals but also sick ones, "from pediatrics to geriatrics," as Dr. Michel put it.

When the training is complete, Higgins will assist clinicians and nurses in the management of cases requiring nasal esophageal tubes for feeding, cases needing parenteral nutrition, and those requiring diet management. She will see patients to monitor weight reduction

diets or animals with special needs due to chronic diseases. The nurse practitioner will keep abreast of new developments in the nutritional field and will teach other nurses and students. Another goal is the development of a continuing education program in nutrition for nurses.

And who knows, may be one day soon, VHUP will have a weight watchers' program for dogs and cats!

Charlotte Higgins is a certified animal health technician. She worked as an anesthesia nurse at VHUP and then as a general nurse before accepting this new position. 

Alumni Award of Merit — Call for Nominations

Tell us about a Penn Vet of whom you are proud...

Award Guidelines

The Alumni Award of Merit is awarded each year to three University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine alumni celebrating a reunion, whether in practice, academia, industry, research, government service or any other professional area, who:

Advance knowledge in biomedicine, promote welfare of animals through public education of animal owners, and benefit society through civic activities which foster the advancement of the profession and the School's good name.

Selection Criteria

1. The nominee must be a University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine graduate; 2. Nominations shall be submitted in writing to the Alumni Office; 3. The Nominating Committee will assemble and review information pertaining to the nominee's achievements/contributions to the profession; 4. The awards shall be presented during the Veterinary medical Alumni Society's general meeting in May.

Nomination Form

For the 2001 Alumni Award of Merit, I nominate: *(please print)*

Name _____ Graduation Year _____

Address _____

My reasons for making this nomination are (resume required):

Name _____

Signature _____

Address _____

Please return form to University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine, Alumni Office, 3800 Spruce Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104.