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Roger Caras Honored

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Transfusion Medicine and the Blood Bank at VHUP

Transfusion medicine is a relatively new field in veterinary medicine and blood transfusions are becoming an increasingly important treatment modality. They are the number one tissue transplant procedure in humans and animals. Donna Oakley, VHUP head nurse and blood bank coordinator, provided an overview of transfusion medicine and the canine blood donor program at the Veterinary Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. She mentioned that the first reported canine blood transfusion was performed in the late 1800s by surgically attaching the artery of one dog to the vein of another. Today blood is transfused through IV catheters and, in most cases, whole blood is not administered, just the required specific components of blood.

Blood is composed of a liquid portion, the plasma, and a cellular portion consisting of different cell types: red blood cells carrying oxygen; white cells serving as a defense mechanism producing antibodies and locating, engulfing, and destroying foreign material; platelets with strong adhesive properties facilitating clotting. Plasma consists of water, salt and proteins (albumin, clotting factors, etc.). A unit of blood can be separated into its different components, allowing treatment of specific diseases with specific blood products.

For example, a red cell transfusion may be needed if an animal has become anemic due to Babesia canis (a protozoan) infection or from heavy flea infestation. Red cells are also needed for the crisis management of hemolytic anemia before the acquisition of the vehicle and its equipment can occur. Immune mediated reaction where the body destroys red cells because of antibodies present in the recipient; and non-immune mediated reaction which occurs when the blood products being transfused are defective, due to an improperly collected, stored or administered product. Both reactions are severe and can occur for up to three weeks after the transfusion, requiring close monitoring of transfusion patients. At VHUP all blood and blood products are stored in state-of-the-art refrigerators and freezers designed to keep the required temperatures at all times. All blood transfused here is passed through special filters to remove clots or other debris.

Ms. Oakley briefly mentioned some blood transfusion alternatives reducing adverse transfusion reactions: concentrated hemoglobin transfusion or a hormone treatment that stimulates production of red blood cells; preoperative autologous donation where, prior to elective surgery, the animal donates its own blood which is available later if needed; acute normovolemic hemodilution for long procedures requiring close monitoring of transfusion patients; and normovolemic hemodilution for short procedures. VHUP’s transfusion medicine specialists to visit large breeding kennels and kennel club-organized blood drives in outlying areas where blood can be collected from canine donors, making the donation of blood much more convenient for dogs and their owners.

The acquisition of the vehicle and its equipment is made possible through the generous donations of the Bernice Barbour Foundation, Dr. Daniel Bleicher, Officer Dan Buckley, Chester Valley Kennel Club, Delaware Valley German Shepherd Dog Club, Devon Dog Show Association, Mr. and Mrs. Peter Nero, Penn Ridge Kennel Club, Penn Treatment Center, Clumber Spaniel Club, German Shepherd Dog Club, and Mrs. Ferdinand White.

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The Maryland Veterinary Medical Society held a "roast" for Dr. Roger A. Caras in Baltimore in October. At the end of the evening Dr. Caras was lauded for his many contributions to wildlife, animal welfare, and the veterinary profession at large. Dean Andrews presented the School's Centennial Medal to Dr. Caras. Following is the laudation, composed by Dr. Donald A. Abt, that was read during the presentation:

"Distinguished spokesman for and champion of all animal life, large and small, domestic or wild, traveling the world over to share your love and devotion for animals with your fellow human beings through authorship of highly respected and widely read books and magazine articles; notable radio and television presenter; tireless personal contributor of talent, time and energy to a legion of worthy organizations dedicated to the well being of animals; and wise counselor to those in need. World traveler from the plains of Africa to the islands of Greece, to the Far East, to Prince William Sound and even to the South Pole, to identify but a few of the sites where your concern for animals and society has drawn you.

From each location, you brought back a new and vital appreciation for and understanding of the fragile balance within which our non-human neighbors live. Your eloquent voice then focused our attention, with clarity and respect, on the needs and plight of those deserving our concern. You have brought constructive awareness of our responsibilities to all segments of our society.

In particular, you have served the School of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania with great distinction both as a member of its Board of Overseers and as a deeply involved participatory member if the adjunctive faculty. As an Overseer, you have provided your fellow Board members with the interactions of animals and mankind thereby facilitating enlightened decisions crucial to the advancement of the School. As a teacher, you have paved the way for essential broadening of our students' horizons. Your course dealing with the diverse interactions of veterinary medicine and society became a bench mark to which others aspired as it led our students into uncharted waters. The ever-increasing requests for enrollment were a testament to the value of your contribution and signified the forethought you exhibited by seeking the opportunity to present such a course. What was once unorthodox has now become common place through your concerns and gift of sharing. To share oneself through the education of our youth is truly a noble gift.

In recognition of your extensive contributions to our School and the veterinary profession at large, we are honored to present you this, the Centennial Medal of the School of Veterinary Medicine."