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30

Center for Veterinary Critical Care Established

When the Veterinary Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania (VHUP) opened in 1981, the Emergency Service (ES) case load was less than 1,000 annually. Today about 40 percent of VHUP's patients require specialized care that involves the Emergency Service, Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and the Anesthesia Service, reflecting the hospital's role as a regional critical care referral center for companion animals. The annual case load has grown to more than 8,000 in ES and over 1,200 in ICU.

To even better serve the patients' needs, the School, in November 1990, created the Center for Veterinary Critical Care (CVCC), a multi-disciplinary unit within the Department of Clinical Studies at Philadelphia. The Center encompasses six faculty positions, two each from anesthesia, ICU and ES, as well as residents, nurses, technicians, students, and staff from each of the three services.

Veterinary emergency and intensive care have made great strides in the last few years, paralleling developments in human medicine. By establishing the CVCC, the first wholly integrated veterinary critical care unit in the world, Penn's Veterinary School is able to enhance and advance veterinary critical care. The Center fosters closer interaction between clinicians of the different services and facilitates a smoother transfer of cases from one service to another. Further, through the continual involvement of the various clinicians in patient care at all three levels, more efficient coordination of treatment is achieved. The training program for students and residents is enhanced as the three services function as one unit.

The Emergency Service at VHUP is staffed 24 hours a day by specially trained nurses, residents, faculty and students, seven



days a week. This independent unit is equipped to provide acute care including CPR, oxygen support and ventilation, EKG, both direct and indirect blood pressure monitoring, laboratory work, radiology and minor surgery. Emergency surgery is performed by surgery and anesthesia staff on call.

The Intensive Care Unit provides care to the sickest patients admitted through Emergency Services or other hospital services. It is staffed by specially trained nurses around the clock, seven days a week. The unit is equipped, and the nurses trained, to provide CPR, ventilation, peritoneal dialysis, parenteral or enteral nutrition, direct blood pressure monitoring, stat laboratory work, including arterial blood gases, and all routine support. It is, at this point, one of the most sophisticated Intensive Care Units at a veterinary hospital anywhere. In addition to the nursing staff, two full-time medicine faculty work in the ICU exclusively, as well as a resident and

students. The anesthesia faculty provide additional supervision for surgery cases. Residents in critical care veterinary medicine train in the Emergency Service, the Intensive Care Unit and rotate through anesthesia, medicine, cardiology and surgery. The residency program is three years in length.

In addition to even better patient care, the CVCC provides enhanced teaching for students and residents. Daily rounds are presented in each service and weekly combined ICU-ES care rounds are held to discuss cases seen in both services. These rounds involve staff from ICU, ES, cardiology, anesthesia, medicine, and surgery. There are also regularly scheduled critical care seminars where the critical care faculty and residents discuss ongoing research and topics of common interest, and assess new approaches to clinical problems.

The CVCC is co-directed by Dr. Joan Hendricks, associate professor of medicine, and Dr. Alan Klide, associate professor and chief, section of anesthesia.