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Toxicologist Joins Diagnostic Laboratory

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Toxicologist joins diagnostic laboratory

Housing and industrial developments are encroaching on farm land, exposing food animals and horses to more natural and man-made toxins. Depending on the toxin, they may cause, for example, a mild illness and subsequent reduction of meat, milk or egg production, or they may be fatal. But trying to figure out the precise toxin requires a veterinary toxicologist and series of sophisticated tests.

The Agriculture Animal Health Diagnostic Laboratory at New Bolton Center now has such a specialist on staff and will be setting up a toxicology diagnostic laboratory. Dr. Robert Poppenga came to Penn in December from the veterinary school at Michigan State University where he served as assistant professor of toxicology.

"The potential for poisonings in animals is great," said Dr. Poppenga. "Animal poisons include plant and mold toxins, metals, agrichemicals such as

insecticides, feed additives and veterinary drugs. Our task will be to try to prevent exposure of animals to such toxins, or, if exposure has occurred, ensure that the substance is identified and removed to protect other animals on the farm. In addition, the toxicology laboratory will be an information and referral resource for veterinarians and the agriculture community in Pennsylvania.

Dr. Poppenga will set up the toxicology laboratory at the School as part of the tri-partite laboratory system established by the Pennsylvania Animal Health and Diagnostic Commission in 1992.

"While the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Diagnostic Laboratory at Summerdale will continue to offer basic toxicology analyses, the toxicology laboratory at New Bolton Center will be the primary laboratory for the diagnosis of animal poisonings within the Commonwealth," he said.

Veterinary toxicology is not simple

as so many different species are involved. "For example," Dr. Poppenga explained, "monensin, an anticoccidiostat routinely added to chicken feed, is highly toxic and potentially fatal to horses; or, cows can tolerate high copper levels in water while sheep will become extremely ill at such levels. Ordinary substances like salt, too, can act as a toxin if they are consumed in excess."

While Dr. Poppenga's base will be at New Bolton Center and his main focus will be on food animals and horses, he will be available for consultation by small animal practitioners.

Dr. Poppenga received his veterinary degree from the University of Illinois in 1978 and his Ph.D. degree in veterinary toxicology in 1987 from the same institution. He worked at the Michigan State University School of Veterinary Medicine from 1987 until 1993. He is a diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Toxicology. ■

VHUP to construct Harold H. Fehr Emergency Service Pavilion

Harold H. Fehr, a 1923 graduate of the University's Wharton School, made a major planned gift to the School of Veterinary Medicine to renovate the Emergency Service. The Emergency Service, one of the busiest areas of the hospital, is the cornerstone of the Center for Veterinary Critical Care (CVCC) — the first wholly integrated small animal veterinary critical care unit in the world. More than 8,000 visits are made to the Emergency Service annually.

The Harold H. Fehr Emergency Service Pavilion will significantly enhance the hospital's ability to provide the finest emergency care to seriously ill and injured small animals.

Dr. Joan Hendricks, Vice Chair of the Department of Clinical Studies in Philadelphia and Co-Director of the CVCC, says of the gift: "All of us at VHUP are thrilled by Mr. Fehr's generosity. Although VHUP has the best Emergency Service at a veterinary school, renovations have been needed for



Dr. Kenneth Drobotz, director of VHUP's Emergency Service, Barry Stupine, director of VHUP, and Mr. and Mrs. Harold H. Fehr during a visit to VHUP's Emergency Service.

some time to accommodate our large caseload. With the Harold H. Fehr Emergency Service Pavilion, our facility will now rival the most advanced trauma/emergency treatment and diagnostic centers in human medicine."

The renovation is expected to be completed later this fall. The Emergency Service will temporarily relocate to another part of the hospital while the renovations are underway and remain open for business. ■