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Collaboration Between Vet School and School of Social Work Takes Off

By Katherine Kruger

At first glance, a collaboration between a School of Veterinary Medicine and a School of Social Work may seem unlikely, perhaps even unnecessary. Not so at Penn, where one of the Vet School's multidisciplinary research centers – the Center for the Interaction of Animals and Society (CIAS) – focuses its attention on the study of human-animal relationships. In fact, collaboration between the two schools was first established almost 20 years ago. Now, **Dr. James A. Serpell**, director of the CIAS, wants to enhance this link because of the unique knowledge and skills that social workers can bring to the study of human-animal interactions.

It's been just over a year since Symme Trachtenberg, MSW, LSW, director of Community Education at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP), signed-on to be the liaison between the two schools, and the relationship is already in full bloom. As of this printing, there are five collaborators from the School of Social Work who are actively contributing to the work of the CIAS.

Current projects underway include the creation of an educational program called, "Kids Caring for Pets," that teaches children about the responsibilities of adopting and caring for pets. This program – developed by Ryan Veterinary Hospital staff members **Dr. Stephen Mehler**, intern; **Sally Powell**, Critical Care/ES nursing supervisor; and **Alison Seward**, behavior technician – is currently being piloted at the new Sadie Alexander University of Pennsylvania Partnership School and other schools in West Philadelphia. Since November, the Kids Caring for Pets Program has visited four schools and done ten presentations. Hundreds of children have participated, and preliminary data suggest that the program is having a positive impact on students' understanding of what it takes to keep pets happy and healthy.

The social work group is also collaborating with CHOP to evaluate its animal visitation program, known as PAW Partners. This program, which provides opportunities for children and their families to interact with visiting animals, has been well received and is highly successful, and the social work group hopes to take a more objective look at its benefits. Dr. Kinnevy and Ms. Levinthal are studying the link between child abuse and animal abuse. They are also using diagnosis codes from the

Vet School's patient database to map clusters of companion animal disease within the city. This information will be used to target educational and community outreach efforts.

If you would like additional information on the collaboration between the Schools of Veterinary Medicine and Social Work, or you know of a school that would like to host the "Kids Caring for Pets" educational program, please contact Ms. Kathy Kruger at 215-746-0096, or kkruger@vet.upenn.edu. Alternatively, you can learn more about the work of the CIAS by visiting: www.vet.upenn.edu/ResearchCenters/CIAS/



A fourth-grade student at Samuel B. Huey Elementary School listens to Lulu's heart with Sally Powell, Critical Care/ES nursing supervisor.

New DNA-based Test for Inherited Disease in Schipperkes

Researchers at the School have developed a new DNA-based test for an inherited disease in the schipperke, a breed of dog. The disease, mucopolysaccharidosis type IIIB (MPS IIIB, also known as Sanfilippo syndrome, type IIIB), is an autosomal recessive disease that is classified as a lysosomal storage disease. Other better-known lysosomal storage diseases that occur in humans include Tay-Sachs disease and Gaucher disease.

This is the first time that MPS IIIB has been diagnosed in any companion animal. The symptoms of MPS IIIB in the schipperke are caused by serious and progressive damage to the brain and include tremors, stumbling, and falling. Symptoms in the dog first appear at two to three years of age. The brain disease progresses until the dogs are no longer able to stand, walk, eat, drink, or eliminate without assistance, and owners have had to elect euthanasia for their pets one to two years after the onset of symptoms.

This DNA-based test is the latest in over a dozen different mutation-specific DNA-based tests for inherited disorders offered or developed by the researchers in the Section of Medical Genetics at the School.

The initial schipperke case came to the attention of Penn researchers in late 1998, when **Dr. Urs Giger** and colleagues in the Section of Medical Genetics at the School identified MPS IIIB in a dog in samples that had been submitted for analysis to the School's metabolic genet-

ic screening laboratory. Since then other dogs have also been studied in the breed. The identification of the mutation and development of the test was performed by **Dr. N. Matthew Ellinwood**, a post-doctoral fellow in comparative medical genetics. The DNA testing of schipperkes for the MPS IIIB mutation will be conducted through the School's Josephine Deubler Genetic Disease Testing Laboratory.

"As devastating as this disease is, we are fortunate that we can help eradicate the condition through testing that identifies animals that are affected or are carriers," says Ellinwood. "This allows breeders to eliminate affected animals from their breeding program and mate carriers only to animals that do not carry the disease. Eventually the schipperke breeders, using this test, will be able to eliminate this disease in the breed."

"Unfortunately, the mutations in humans are so rare, and so varied, that it is not practical to test people routinely, nor are there routine and effective ways to screen newborns children for the disease.

"One of the most devastating things is that in some families the eldest child in a family, diagnosed at 3-5 years of age, may have younger siblings who also have the disease but have not yet started to have symptoms, so that parents will confront more than one devastating diagnosis. Finding effective ways to treat this

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