

UPEI NewsRELEASE

Atlantic Veterinary College • University of Prince Edward Island • 550 University Avenue • Charlottetown, PEI
Phone: (902) 566-0533 • Fax: (902) 566-0958

Atlantic Veterinary College's Animal Welfare Centre provides \$210,000 in funding for projects

For immediate release:

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(Charlottetown, PEI): Nine service and research projects that will benefit companion animals, horses and wildlife recently received \$210,000 in funding from the Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre at the Atlantic Veterinary College, UPEI. The projects, which were determined to be eligible for funding through the Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre's 2004 funding competition, will be carried out by faculty and students at the Atlantic Veterinary College at UPEI. Since the Animal Welfare Centre was established in 1994, a total of 85 projects have been funded at a cost of \$1.9 million. These projects have directly involved 75 faculty, 10 graduate students and many veterinary students.

"We are very pleased with the scope of projects that we are able to support through the generosity of the Sir James Dunn and Friends of the Christofor Foundations," says Dr. Alice Crook, Coordinator of the Animal Welfare Centre. "This year we have approved support for three new exciting research projects and one new service project. We have also approved continued funding for five highly successful service projects, including the *Medical and surgical care of homeless dogs and cats* project which has enabled more than 2,500 animals from area shelters to be cared for at the AVC since the program was established in 1994."

The breakdown of projects funded through this year's competition is as follows:

New research projects

- Acupuncture for the treatment of heaves in horses (Dr. Art Ortenburger);
- Vagal maneuvers to lower heart rates in dogs and cats (Dr. Étienne Côté); and
- Selenium and vitamin e levels in horses on PEI (Dr. Jeff Wichtel).

New service project

- Health management services for the Handibear Hills Equine Sanctuary (Dr. Wendy Duckett)

Continued service projects

- Wildlife rehabilitation - including orphaned wildlife care (Dr. Hans Gelens);
- Medical and surgical care of homeless dogs and cats (Dr. Caroline Runyon);
- AVC humane dog training program (Dr. Norma Guy);
- AVC humane education program (Dr. Norma Guy); and
- Health management services for the PEI Equine Retirement Society Inc. (Dr. Wendy Duckett).

A backgrounder is attached with information on each project.

Originally established as the Animal Welfare Unit in 1994, the Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre at the Atlantic Veterinary College is dedicated to education, service and research in the welfare of companion animals, horses and wildlife. The Centre is unique in Canada and one of few in the world. For information on the Animal Welfare Centre, please visit the web site at: www.upei.ca/awc

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Contacts:

Dr. Alice Crook, Coordinator, Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre (902) 628-4360

Charlotte McCardle, External Relations, AVC (902) 566-0533

Backgrounder

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Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre: 2004 Funded Projects

Acupuncture for the treatment of heaves in horses (Dr Art Ortenburger)

Recurrent airway obstruction, or heaves, is a common chronic respiratory disease of adult horses, similar to asthma in people. It is a progressively debilitating condition that prevents the horse being exercised and results in a gradual decrease in the horse's quality of life, generally to the point where euthanasia is the only humane option. Signs include coughing, wheezing, difficulty in breathing, and exercise intolerance. With appropriate treatment, the signs can usually be managed so that horses can breathe easier and return to more normal activity levels. As with human asthma, there are a variety of drug treatments available, not all of which benefit all patients and some of which can cause serious side effects.

Acupuncture is an inexpensive, non-invasive, safe procedure that has been used with some success by veterinarians to treat heaves in horses. Acupuncture has been available at the Atlantic Veterinary College since 1996, when an acupuncture service was started by Dr. Ortenburger with a grant from the Animal Welfare Centre. This project is a clinical trial to look at the therapeutic effect of acupuncture in horses by comparing various respiratory function measurements in horses with heaves that do and do not receive acupuncture treatment. Horses in the trial will benefit by both treatment and diagnostics, and the results will shed light on the effects of acupuncture in horses affected with this debilitating condition.

Vagal maneuvers to lower heart rate in dogs and cats (Dr. Étienne Côté)

Vagal maneuvers are simple, gentle physical manipulations that are performed by veterinarians to temporarily slow an animal's heart rate. These may be used in a patient with a fast heartbeat during a physical exam or an electrocardiogram, to assist the veterinarian to better evaluate a heart murmur or to determine the reason for the rapid heartbeat. Vagal maneuvers may also be used as a short term treatment for certain dangerous, uncontrollably rapid heart rhythms.

The two most common maneuvers are ocular pressure (rubbing of the closed eyes), and carotid sinus massage (gentle rubbing of the patient's throat). The principle underlying the use of vagal maneuvers has been known and used in human medicine for centuries but although recommended in veterinary cardiology texts, there is little to no objective information to guide veterinarians in their use.

In this study, Dr. Côté will compare the effectiveness of the two main types of vagal maneuvers in slowing the heart rate in healthy dogs and cats. The information will help veterinarians to use and accurately interpret the effects of vagal maneuvers in their own patients.

Selenium and Vitamin E levels in horses on PEI (Dr. Jeff Wichtel)

Selenium and vitamin E are essential components of the diet of livestock, including horses. Unfortunately deficiency in these nutrients is an ongoing problem in Eastern Canada, mainly due to a soil insufficiency of selenium which results in low levels in hay, pasture, and grain. Inadequate levels of these nutrients are known to cause muscular and neurological diseases, a decreased immune response, and decreased thyroid function in horses. Broodmares deficient in vitamin E and selenium give birth to foals who can subsequently develop severe problems such as white muscle disease, which is often fatal.

Preliminary data indicates that selenium and vitamin E levels are deficient or marginal in many adult horses on PEI. This study will look at levels of these nutrients in three groups of Island horses - older horses, broodmares and foals, and racehorses - to establish the prevalence of these deficiencies. The ultimate goal is to be able to make recommendations to horse owners and veterinarians about appropriate supplementation with vitamin E and selenium, so as to prevent the serious problems associated with deficiencies in these nutrients.

Wildlife rehabilitation (including orphaned wildlife care) (Dr. Hans Gelens)

Concerned members of the public often bring orphaned or injured wild animals (birds and small mammals) to the Atlantic Veterinary College. Sometimes these animals require medical attention, sometimes temporary nursing and supportive care (especially for orphaned wildlife), and sometimes the best thing for them is humane euthanasia. Unfortunately mortality among these animals is often high, due to the lack of accurate information and the inherent difficulties in the rescue and care of different species of wildlife. Over 400 animals have received care through this project since it was started in 1999 at the AVC. The project has resulted in an increase in the number of successful releases back into the wild, expanded veterinary student participation, and the establishment of networks with other wildlife rehabilitators.

This project has been funded again this year, to build upon and improve the existing level of care for injured or orphaned wildlife at AVC, including the purchase of specialized supplies. The project will also continue to provide practical experience for veterinary students interested in wildlife care, equipping them to play a leadership role in this area in their communities once they graduate. The end goal for all patients is successful release back into the wild.

Medical and surgical care of homeless dogs and cats (Dr. Caroline Runyon)

Funded since 1994 through the Animal Welfare Centre, this project will continue to address the problems of pet overpopulation and homeless animals in the region. During the past 10 years, more than 2,500 dogs and cats have received care through this program. In 2002 and 2003, over 50 dogs and cats from the PEI Humane Society, the Moncton SPCA, and the Amherst Animal Shelter were neutered at the AVC and returned to the shelter for adoption. Over the same time period, over 350 stray dogs and cats were brought to the AVC Teaching Hospital by the PEIHS or good Samaritans, for treatment of illness or injury. These animals receive physical examinations, x-rays, and/or other diagnostic procedures; emergency medical care; and continued medical or surgical care (including neutering) as required, in consultation with the shelter. Some lost animals are claimed by their owners. Most animals, once healthy, are placed in homes through standard shelter adoption. Some animals are placed in "special needs" adoptive homes because they require specific care during recovery. Animals with severe illness or extensive injuries are humanely euthanised.

The project has been funded for a further two years. There are many benefits. Neutered animals are more adoptable and healthier and they won't "accidentally" produce any litters. Sick or injured dogs and cats found by, or brought to, the Humane Society have immediate access to treatment. Due to the close working relationship developed with the animal shelters, there is increased awareness and discussion of companion animal welfare issues for AVC students.

AVC humane dog training program (Dr. Norma Guy)

Most dogs that are given up to animal shelters in North America are adolescents (six months to two years of age). Many of these dogs may appear boisterous and unruly, and have had little training. Through this project, funded initially in 2001, a program was developed by AVC students to work with the PEI Humane Society, its dogs, and their new owners. Student trainers work with an average of 190 dogs per year at the PEIHS, to provide them with positive social interaction, training using behaviour modification, and more outdoor exercise. After the dogs are adopted, the students are available to provide support and counseling for new owners as to what to expect, as well as training advice. An attempt is made to contact all new owners within a week of adoption, whether or not the dogs have worked with the AVC student trainers.

This project has received funding for another year. Behaviour modification using positive reinforcement (clicker training) is used. No aversive, or punishment-based, techniques are employed. Interaction with the students provides much-needed enrichment for the dogs while they are at the shelter, and the reduction in unwanted behaviours increases the likelihood that the dogs will be adopted, and will fit in happily in their new homes. Working with shelter dogs and their new owners is a valuable experience for the students, who as veterinarians will often have to advise clients on pet behaviour.

AVC humane education program (Dr. Norma Guy)

Since the beginning of this project in 1997, volunteer veterinary students and their pets have made over 350 visits to classrooms from kindergarten to grade 12, to motivate children to think about the welfare of animals, and to increase their awareness of human responsibility for animals in their care. Although the program is based in PEI, a number of presentations have been given in the other three Atlantic provinces. Topics include choosing a pet that is right for you and your family, bite prevention, how to communicate with your pet, caring for your pet, and first aid. For older grades there are discussions about our societal responsibilities to pets, with reference to pet overpopulation and euthanasia. Lesson plans, videos, and a French-English colouring book have been put together as supplements to the visits.

This program continues to receive rave reviews from teachers and students at all grade levels. Lesson plans have been supplied on request to several humane societies across Canada, and to interested school teachers in the region. Funding has been extended for this project for the next year, to hire a student coordinator and to cover travel expenses and the cost of materials. Teachers interested in a presentation for their classroom, may contact Dr. Norma Guy at 566-0923.

Health management services for the PEI Equine Retirement Society Inc. (Dr. Wendy Duckett)

The PEI Equine Retirement Society Inc. (PEIERS) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the rehabilitation of horses destined to be destroyed or shipped for the meat industry, and to finding new homes for them as pets or pleasure horses. Since its founding in O'Leary in 1996 by Mr. Dale Cameron, the Society has taken in 27 horses of which 15 have been placed in new homes, four have been euthanized due to intractable health problems and eight are currently at the facility. Through the support of the Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre, AVC has provided preventive medical care to the horses at the Society from the beginning.

With this project, funding is continued for two more years. The program includes a physical exam on all horses that come to the PEIERS, a parasite monitoring and control program for the facility, dental work, routine vaccinations, and minor surgical and medical procedures as needed. The program includes vaccination against Eastern, Western and West Nile Virus Encephalitis, and screening of all horses arriving at the facility for equine infectious anemia. AVC senior veterinary students, interns and residents all participate in the care of these horses. This project provides significant benefits to the horses through basic preventive medicine in preparation for adoption, and by minimizing respiratory disease and parasite burden at the facility.

Health management services for the Handibear Hills Equine Sanctuary (Dr. Wendy Duckett)

Similar to the project *Health management services for the PEI Equine Retirement Society Inc.*, this project will provide preventive medical care to the horses at the Handibear Hills Equine Sanctuary. This facility in South Granville PEI is owned by Ms. Yogi Fell who for 20 years has provided a refuge for horses that need a home. Young people and adults spend time at Handibear Hills with the horses learning to ride, groom, and generally care for the horses.

This project will provide regular dental care and vaccinations for the 24 horses at the sanctuary, and establish a parasite monitoring and control program. The program includes vaccination against Eastern, Western and West Nile Virus Encephalitis. AVC senior veterinary students, interns and residents all participate in the care of these horses.