

NORTHERN PET HEALTH CARE:

Veterinary services aren't available in many of the Northwest Territories' remote communities, and that lack of veterinary care may be one contributing factor to the issues revolving around dogs living in the North. In many parts of Canada, it's widely perceived that dogs in remote northern communities cause health and safety-related problems. Dog bites and attacks, unhealthy dogs and risks of diseases such as rabies are some of the widely-cited issues.

But do these views actually match the actual experiences of people who live in remote northern communities?

Dr. Caroline Millins, a graduate student in WCV's Department of Veterinary Pathology, was recruited to carry out a preliminary assessment of this issue in the Sahtu region, NWT, between May 2007 and April 2008. Her project's goals: to assess the current level of veterinary services available in the Northwest Territories, to assess dog health and welfare, and to investigate the effects of dogs on human and wildlife health in the northern region.

Dr. Susan Kutz of the University of Calgary and Alasdair Veitch of the Government of Northwest Territories were among the people who recruited Millins for the project. Since 2003, Veitch and Kutz have brought together a range of wildlife health resource people to visit communities in the Sahtu Settlement area and to co-ordinate ongoing community-based wildlife health monitoring in the region during annual two-week tours.

After conducting a literature review and interviews with public health, wildlife health officials and veterinarians, Millins travelled north in January to be part of the Sahtu Monitoring Project's 2008 community tour. In each community, the resource team held a series of one-day canine veterinary clinics and asked schoolchildren and pet owners to fill out a questionnaire about dogs. During school visits, team members also made presentations on dog health and relationships among dogs, as well as on human health and wildlife health.

Millins is completing a report on the assessment's findings, but based on preliminary analysis, dogs don't appear to be causing a major problem for human or wildlife health. But issues such as restrictions on the availability of human data on dog bites and zoonotic diseases add uncertainty to this conclusion. Another issue is the lack of *canid* (members of the *Canidae* family that includes wolves and foxes) wildlife surveillance data in northern regions. Strategies to increase the proportion of dogs vaccinated against preventable diseases such as rabies, distemper and canine parvovirus 2 would reduce the risk to human health posed by dogs.

Several organizations sponsored this year's canine-focused aspects of the Sahtu Settlement area community tour. Besides support from the Canadian Cooperative Wildlife Health Centre and the Government of the Northwest Territories, Vets Without Borders Canada (VWBC) awarded a \$10,000 grant to carry out the initial assessment and to purchase veterinary supplies for use in the Northwest Territories.

VWBC also covered Millins' air travel expenses for the northern trip as well as to two related conferences. In addition, Pfizer Animal Health and Bayer generously contributed products for the northern one-day veterinary clinics. **V**



As the longtime director general of the National Research Council's Institute for Biodiagnostics in Winnipeg, Man.,

DR. IAN SMITH

CAHF ADVISORY BOARD MEMBER

Dr. Ian Smith has led many research projects that have helped to advance Canada's diagnostic technologies and capabilities in human health. In particular, Smith has conducted critical research in the early diagnosis of cancer using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and spectroscopy.

What many Canadians may not realize is that Smith has applied that same spirit of discovery to pet health. A former breeder of English springer spaniels, Smith combined his interest in dogs and his expertise in MRI to develop a less expensive MRI unit for veterinarians.

In 1998, his concept led to the creation of a joint venture company whose partners included the University of Saskatchewan, NRC and private investors. The company developed an MRI prototype that was installed in WCV's new MRI and radiation therapy centre in 2002. Today, the MRI unit at WCV continues to play an important role in the College's clinical, research and teaching programs.

Besides his contribution to WCV's medical imaging resources, Smith has been a member of the Companion Animal Health Fund's advisory board for more than two years. His academic background, combined with his well-informed interest in medical research and companion animal health, has made him an invaluable resource for the Fund.

Smith holds a Master of Science degree from the University of Manitoba and a PhD from the University of Cambridge. He also holds honorary doctorates from the University of Stockholm, the University of Winnipeg and the University of Brandon, along with an honorary diploma from Red River Community College.

To view the complete list of CAHF advisory board members, visit www.cahf.usask.ca and click on "Organization."

Above: Dr. Ian Smith hugs Tessa (left), a two-thirds cocker spaniel and one-third poodle, and Sophie, a purebred cocker spaniel. Photo courtesy of Dr. Ian Smith.



BITS & BITES

POTENTIAL POOCH THERAPY? All-trans retinoic acid (ATRA) is a biologically active product in vitamin A metabolism that modulates inflammation. Now, **Dr. Baljit Singh** of WCVM's Veterinary Biomedical Sciences and two of his graduate students are investigating ATRA as a potential treatment for acute inflammation in dogs. During the three-year study, the research team will conduct a series of experiments using cell and molecular biology methods as well as quantitative real-time reverse transcriptase PCR — all technologies now available in WCVM's new research wing.

This project, which will receive \$130,500 over the next three years, is one of three multi-year animal health research investigations that WCVM is supporting through a unique source. In 2006, the College received more than \$768,000 — its share of a large class action settlement worth \$132 million. The class action, which stemmed from the alleged price-fixing of vitamins, was initiated on behalf of direct purchasers, indirect purchasers and consumers of vitamins and vitamin products several years ago. In December 2006, the courts of Ontario, B.C. and Québec decided to distribute the settlement money among charitable organizations, universities, research centres and various consumer associations and agencies.

PATIENT ADVOCATE: Dr. Sarah Stewart of Kamloops, B.C., was the 2008 recipient of the Buddy and Dr. Snead Award in Small Animal Care. The award was announced during WCVM's 2008 Graduation Banquet on May 28.

Stewart received the \$7,000 award in recognition of her compassionate care for companion animal patients during the fourth-year small animal medicine rotation. The Heather Ryan and L. David Dubé Foundation created the annual scholarship in 2007.

CRITICAL ROLE AT WCVM: Dr. Jennifer Ogeer is a specialist in emergency medicine and critical care who joined WCVM's Department of Small Animal Clinical Sciences in the fall of 2007. A 1995 graduate of the Ontario Veterinary College, Ogeer completed a residency in emergency medicine and critical care at OVC in 2004 and received her Master of Science degree in 2005. The specialist is a diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care.

Ogeer's clinical experience and training made her the ideal contributor for *Vet Topics*' story on common foods and household products that are toxic to pets. See inside (pages 12-14) for more details.

CAHF AT HUB CITY SHOW: CAHF sends a big thank you to CAHF advisory board member John Ross and other members of the Hub City Kennel and Obedience Club for inviting the Fund to be an exhibitor at the club's annual show on May 2-4 in Saskatoon, Sask. The Fund also thanks **Drs. Elisabeth Snead** and **Belle Nibblett**, along with veterinary student **Evan Crawford** and WCVM development officer **Patti Tweed**, for meeting with the show's visitors and participants at the CAHF booth.

NEW HOSPITAL DIRECTOR: Dr. Jacques Messier took up the reins of director at WCVM's Veterinary Teaching Hospital on April 21. Messier, who earned a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine at the Université de Montréal's Faculté de médecine vétérinaire and an MBA from the University of Western Ontario, brings a range of management training and experiences to his new role.

Early in his career, Messier practised veterinary medicine in North Battleford, Sask., for six years before joining Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada where he held several management positions including the Bureau of Veterinary Drugs and the Bureau of Human Prescription Drugs. In the private sector, Messier has been part of the senior management team for several large pharmaceutical and biotechnical companies — including president, COO and CEO of an international pharmaceutical manufacturer and distributor.

Dr. Klaas Post, head of WCVM's Department of Small Animal Clinical Sciences, has been WCVM's acting hospital director since the former director, **Dr. Stan Rubin**, rejoined the veterinary college's faculty during the summer of 2007.

Vet Topics is published by the Western College of Veterinary Medicine's Companion Animal Health Fund. Visit www.cahf.usask.ca for more information.

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PUBLICATIONS MAIL AGREEMENT NO. 40112792
RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
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