

# Paws for Pets



## Vaccine Promising for Dogs with Skin Cancer

**New York**—A new study shows that treatment with a new DNA-based vaccine more than tripled the median survival of dogs with canine malignant melanoma from 90 days to an average of 389 days. Canine malignant melanoma (CMM) is the most common oral cancer in dogs, accounting for 5% of cancer diagnoses. CMM is most successfully treated in its early stage by surgery.

In advanced stages, the median survival of CMM is two to three months. Because the cancer is virtually resistant to chemotherapy and radiation in late stages, new approaches, such as DNA-based vaccines, which harness the immune system, are being tested.

"Most medicines that we use to treat animals are the same as

those given to humans," says Philip J. Bergman DVM, MS, Ph.D., head of the Donaldson-Atwood Cancer Clinic and the Flaherty Comparative Oncology Laboratory at AMC. Bergman was the study's first author.

"This vaccine was first tested in the laboratory at MSKCC and then given to dogs with melanoma after receiving approval from the United States Department of Agriculture and AMC's own Institutional Review Board," he says. "We felt it was useful to see if immunotherapy might help these very sick dogs with advanced melanoma since the response rates for standard chemotherapy were extremely poor with no evidence of improved survival."

Four dogs survived for more than 400 days with the longest

survivor still alive after more than 615 days. The median survival was 389 days.

The study was supported in part by the National Institutes of Health, Bioject, Inc. and Merial Ltd.

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*Treatment with a new DNA-based vaccine more than tripled the median survival of dogs with canine malignant melanoma.*

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### Dates to Remember

- January— Adopt a Rescued Bird Month
- February— Pet Dental Month
- March— Adopt a Rescued Guinea Pig Month
- April— Prevention of Animal Cruelty Month
- June— Adopt a Shelter Cat Month
- July— Adopt a Rescued Rabbit
- October— Adopt a Shelter Dog Month



## Stressed Pets Put on Prozac

DOGS that chase their tails or cats that chew clothes may be suffering obsessive compulsive disorder, experts say.

Pets with the disorder are being prescribed human anti-depressants such as Prozac, and in extreme cases have to be put down. Many are also dumped by owners who cannot cope with their behavior, and some owners are paying thousands of dollars a year for treatment for their canine and feline friends.

Pets suffering from this condition often lick or chew their fur until it falls out. Dogs with the condition may chase their tails for hours, pace up and down or snap at the air as if catching imaginary flies.

Melbourne animal behaviorist Robert Holmes said he had

seen some animals cause themselves serious injuries, including a border collie that licked its leg down to the bone.

Pets suffering from the condition are often genetically predisposed to it. Obsessive compulsive behavior could then be triggered by a pet's experience or environment.

Dogs could be prescribed the animal-specific medication Clomicalm, or, in extreme cases, human anti-depressants such as Prozac.

RSPCA president Hugh Wirth said the disorder was often triggered because "we don't keep dogs like dogs expect to be kept".

Dogs often took to obsessive barking, howling or digging be-

cause being left alone was stressful for an animal with pack instincts.

"One of the over-riding problems for pet animals is the way we keep them in modern society denies them the social existence they are already predetermined to follow," he said.

Veterinary nurse Beverley Wilson said her boxer began obsessive behaviour when put outside after spending time in the house during a particularly hot summer. "He chewed through doors and whinged and barked." Eventually he was prescribed Clomicalm. "He occasionally has lapses. "Any change of routine or weather and he will just panic," she said.

Herald Sun Sunday  
By KYLIE SMITH

## For Love of Disabled Pets

By DONNA HEALY  
Of The Gazette Staff

Disability didn't spell a death sentence for an aging dachshund named Half-pint. With PVC pipe and padding, his owners rigged up a wheelchair after the dog's hindquarters were paralyzed by a back injury a year ago.

"He books around the block. He loves to go for walks," said his owner, Donna Foltmer, who catheterizes Half-pint three times a day to empty his bladder.

"As long as he's happy and content, my husband and I do what we have to do," she said. "He's not just a dog to us. He's like one of our kids."

When the veterinarian offered the option of having the dog put to sleep, the couple's main concern was whether Half-pint was in pain.

"When he gets to the point where he's in pain and suffering, we'll do what we have to do" Foltmer said.

Some owners go to great lengths to care for pets with disabilities or the chronic infirmities that come with age. With more-sophisticated veterinary medicine and better nutrition, the average life span of pets is increasing.

The litany of ills plaguing elderly pets runs the gamut from arthritis and diabetes to cancer, kidney failure and heart disease.

By keeping pets at their optimal weight, providing regular exercise and routine health care, owners can go a long way toward extending their pets' life spans.

Although no ironclad rules apply to aging, smaller dogs tend to live longer than large dogs. Vets often consider dogs to be senior citizens by age 8 or 9, although smaller breeds routinely live to 12 or 16 years old. Cats are usually considered seniors by age 11 or 12, although they routinely make it to age 16.

"Some owners keep their pets alive much, much longer than I think is quality life, but it's their decision, it's their values," said veterinarian Sonya Whiteley.

She tries hard to influence an owner's decision if the animal is suffering.

Dachshunds, like other dogs with long

backs, are prone to spinal injuries. To reduce their risk of injury, some owners teach puppies to avoid jumping or climbing stairs, but Half-pint came to the Foltmers fully grown, with habits firmly entrenched. One evening, he jumped on to the couch, landed wrong and started whining in pain. A myelogram indicated an inoperable injury.

The veterinarian put Half-pint on prednisone, a steroid, to reduce the inflammation. Ironically, Foltmer was just being weaned off prednisone treatments by her own doctor. "We joked he was having sympathy pains," she said.

For some chronic pet ailments, veterinarians can offer a range of treatment options allowing owners to choose between various levels of commitment.

Arthritis, one of the most common chronic conditions of elderly pets, might be managed with one or two pills a day, said Edie Best, a veterinarian at Circle of Life Animal Wellness Center. Or it might be treated more aggressively with injections that start off weekly and continue monthly for the rest of the pet's life.

Kidney failure, one of the most common chronic diseases in cats, is incurable, but injections to help flush out the kidneys can often prolong an animal's life span.

In 1955, Marjorie Sikkenga moved to Billings with just one cat. Over the intervening years, Sikkenga, who is 81, has owned 36 of them. At the moment, she has three - two males and a female. Both of the males, ages 18 and 16, have failing kidneys. Since last August, she has been giving the oldest cat weekly injections of fluids and vitamin B. Her 16-year-old cat, named Gorgeous George after the wrestler, has also been receiving the IV fluids for more than six months.

Pet owners who view their animals as part of the family are often willing to radically alter their own schedules to meet their pets' needs - whether it's giving insulin injections to a diabetic cat or dealing with an

animal's incontinence.

Wheelchairs take a very committed owner, Best said, since an animal paralyzed by a disc injury often loses control of the bladder and possibly the bowels.

Owners with paralyzed pets are starting to see wheelchairs as more of an option, said Lori Holbein. She and her husband, Chad, run Doggon' Wheels, a Livingston company that started making wheelchairs for pets in 1998.

Their niche market has expanded outside of the United States with sales representatives in the United Kingdom and Germany.

Their most frequent customers are owners of dogs paralyzed by back injuries or accidents, but the company has also outfitted ferrets, rabbits, goats, and the occasional pet rat. Of the dozen to two dozen cats they outfit each year, most have been injured in accidents rather than disabled by disease.

Each chair costs \$230 to \$425. The company also sells diapers for doggie incontinence.

Peppy LePew, a 7-1/2-year-old poodle, swings his front legs from side to side as he drags his back legs along in his wheelchair cart. He cocks his head when someone talks to him, taking it all in with soft brown eyes. His name is stamped on a personalized license plate hanging from the back of his chair.

On New Years Eve, Peppy jumped off a chair, and his legs collapsed. His owners, Bernadine and Jack Harris, went ahead with surgery, although the veterinarian doubted it would repair the damage.



## Disabled Pets cont.

In February, when Peppy got his wheels, he wore baby socks to protect his hind paws from scraping against the cement patio. Sometimes he gets the cart stuck in high grass. Indoors, he scoots across the floor without the cart.

Because of his incontinence, the Harrises avoid asking other people to take care of him. They have never boarded him at a kennel.

Some end-of-life decisions require tough judgment calls.

While most animals adjust easily to having one leg amputated, Jorden remembers hesitating early in his career when an owner insisted on surgery for a miniature poodle that needed both its right front and right rear legs amputated.

"Two on the same side, I didn't think it would be able to function," he said.

The dog proved him wrong.

"It would bounce around the room, run around on two legs and lean against a wall when it stopped," Jorden said. "It was one of the happiest dogs."

A three-legged dog stole vet tech Holly Hayes's heart. Hayes found Maggie, a mixed-breed boxer, after it had been hit by a truck. The accident damaged the dog's optic nerve, leaving Maggie blind. Her

front leg, which dangled uselessly after the accident, was later amputated.

Hayes returned the dog to her original owners, but Maggie got loose again on a hunting trip in Western Montana.

"I really felt bad thinking she was out in the mountains somewhere, not being able to see," Hayes said.

On a hunch, she called the area's Humane Society and described the dog. Someone had already found Maggie hopping down a mountain road and had brought her to the shelter. Hayes agreed to adopt Maggie if no one else stepped forward.

"Some blind dogs barely hop along, and she just scoots," Hayes said.

Maggie flies down stairs and moves with ease over familiar terrain.

Shami, a 12-1/2-year-old Lhasa apso, who looks like a dust mop without the stick, has had a harder time adjusting to her blindness. In November, Shami's eyes had to be surgically removed. Her blindness resulted suddenly from a complication of diabetes.

She and her husband, Nicholas, have owned Shami since the dog was a puppy.

"She would bump into things, she would get confused and we would cry. We wondered if we were doing the right thing," Stanislawek said. "Now we're her seeing

eye dogs."

Shami, who once exuberantly chased leaves across the yard, now walks gingerly to avoid bumping into things. Stanislawek quit moving things around the house so Shami could get accustomed to the layout. She lifts Shami onto chairs, carries her down stairs and watches while Shami plays in the yard.

The Stanislaweks learned to give insulin shots to Shami, practicing their technique on an orange.

"She's very spoiled. But we love doing it because she gives way more than we can ever give her," Stanislawek said.

Hair has grown over Shami's eyes, making her scars less noticeable. She has gradually started playing with her squeaky toys again.

In the evening, Shami listens for the sound of Nicholas' truck coming home. When she hears it, she goes to the kitchen door and waits for it to open.



## Centerpiece: Panting Painters

By LINDA GORDON

Janice Lightman, like any loving mom, enthusiastically supported her little boy when he timidly approached his first art project.

"Create, darling," she cooed. "Create a scene for me, honey. Don't be scared."

"Poor Elmer gets frightened easily," Lightman muttered to no one in particular as her 5-year-old held back, hesitant about approaching the canvas.

He was sure to settle down, she added. "After all, this is his favorite place."

The problem was, he was outside that place — Korbie's Den in the Bank of Naples Plaza — not inside where he was accustomed to cadging cookies and playing with toys. And out there on the sidewalk, his mom was encouraging him to do something pretty weird.

After a big man named Mike Traviola un-

## Pampered pooches help homeless

ceremoniously dipped the Boston terrier's usually immaculate black and white paws into pools of red, blue, yellow and green paint, he was then expected to produce an artistic masterpiece.

Eventually, inspiration struck and the feisty little guy got into the routine, tippy-toeing across two canvases sitting on drop cloths, as his proud mom cheered him on.

[Continued on Back](#)

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### Centerpiece: Panting Painters Continued

Passersby paused, their curiosity piqued.

"I'm afraid to ask what this is," one person commented, "but whatever it is, I love it. It's great."

Lightman was delighted, too.

Elmer wasn't given time to bask in the glory, however. The big man returned to wash off the water soluble paint and towel him down, his two abstracts resting on bushes to dry in the sun.

Within minutes, two new canvases were in place, surrounded by more paint pools. This time, two experienced artists went to work with a minimum of coaxing. The little Shih Tzus named Korbie and Travis are old hands — make that old paws — at painting.

After all, it was their mom, Debbie Traviolia, who introduced paw painting to Naples when she opened Korbie's Den Pet Boutique & Bakery about four months ago.

"I learned about the concept on the Internet," the former Chicago area resident said. "Several shelters were using it for fund raising."

Now the Humane Society of Collier County is benefiting, too.

For every painting she sells — and some have gone for \$100 at silent auctions — Traviolia donates all but \$20 or so to the organization.

"I just keep enough to cover the cost of materials," she said. "This is basically a charity thing. My two enjoy doing it," she added. "And I figured Elmer would, too. The livelier and smarter the dog, the more they take to it."

But Traviolia had another reason for recruiting the Boston terrier. He's sleek and short-haired.

"I knew he'd have a different style of painting," the boutique owner said. "You saw how Elmer did paw prints. My fluffy, long-haired boys have a more sweeping technique and also paint with their ears and noses.

"Could my dog do it?" a customer inquired.

"Well, I think Woody is a little bit too mellow for painting," Traviolia answered diplomatically. "He'd probably lay down in

the middle of the canvas."

As Korbie and Travis added the final flourishes to their pictures, Elmer Gantry was now clean, dry and ready to be rewarded for his artistic efforts.

"Come on, honey, it's time to pick out a toy." Lightman said. "He loves to shop here."

Elmer obliged, returning with a stuffed bunny in his mouth.

Now it was mom's turn to go shopping — to buy picture frames.

"These are my child's first drawings," she said, "Naturally they'll hang in a place of honor."

