

Veterinary Research News

Global News

Animal coronaviruses provide clues in the hunt to identify and stop the SARS virus

On March 12, the World Health Organization issued a global alert for cases of atypical pneumonia in response to an unidentified severe respiratory illness spreading in China and Vietnam. Within days, the WHO had assembled an international team of laboratories to identify the SARS pathogen.

Meanwhile, in the United States the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had begun contacting experts on coronaviruses, a family of RNA viruses known to cause severe respiratory and intestinal disease in many species of animals. They suspected SARS was a coronavirus. Within a month, several laboratories around the globe, including a CDC laboratory, had sequenced the genome of the SARS virus.

The journal *Science*, published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, released the first peer-reviewed genomic studies of two strains of SARS on May 1. The studies are posted on *Science* magazine's Web site, www.science.org/feature/data/sars/.

At press time in early May, a cumulative total of more than 5,663 SARS cases with more than 372 deaths had been reported from 26 countries, according to the WHO. SARS has a relatively low fatality rate, 4 percent to 6 percent, compared with some of the animal coronaviruses, which may have fatality rates up to 100 percent.

Prior to the identification of SARS, only two coronaviruses were known to cause illness in humans, and those viruses cause only minor cold symptoms, according to Dr.

Thomas G. Ksiazek, a veterinarian and the chief of the Special Pathogens Branch in the CDC Division of Viral and Rickettsial Diseases. There are several coronaviruses, however, that are known to cause severe respiratory and intestinal diseases in animals.

"Much of the knowledge about coronaviruses comes from research on economically important diseases (in food animals)," Dr. Ksiazek said.

Dr. David A. Brian, a veterinarian and coronavirus expert at the University of Tennessee, provided reagents to the CDC that his laboratory uses to sequence coronavirus genomes.

SARS is unusual in a number of respects, Dr. Brian said. He explained that there are three groups of coronaviruses—two infect mammals, one infects birds. The genetic sequence of SARS is unique, but it shares similarities with coronaviruses in all three groups. Some experts have proposed creating a fourth group for SARS, but no change has yet been made.

At press time, scientists had successfully infected primates with the SARS virus in experimental conditions, but zoonotic transmission of the disease under natural conditions has not been confirmed, according to the WHO.

Dr. Niels C. Pedersen, director of the Center for Companion Animal Health, was one of three veterinarians and animal scientists invited to

join a CDC SARS advisory group. Dr. Pedersen said the advisory group discussed some of the characteristics of coronaviruses in animals that may be important to understanding SARS.

News of the Profession

Stakeholders invited to public forum on educational equivalence assessment for graduates of non-AVMA-accredited colleges

For several months, representatives from the AVMA and the American Association of Veterinary State Boards have been working together to identify key issues related to certifying the educational equivalence of veterinarians educated in non-AVMA-accredited veterinary colleges. Programs currently in place for educational equivalence assessment include the AVMA-sponsored Educational Commission for Foreign Veterinary Graduates and the AAVSB-sponsored Program for Assessment of Veterinary Education Equivalence.

To provide stakeholders with an opportunity to share their views regarding educational equivalence assessment processes, representatives of the ECFVG and PAVE will host a public forum at 1 p.m. on Thursday, June 26, at the Courtyard Philadelphia Airport Hotel. Stakeholders include, but are not limited to, representatives of professional associations, schools/colleges of veterinary medicine, veterinary specialty boards/colleges, state licensing boards, government agencies, graduates of accredited and nonaccredited veterinary colleges, and members of the public. Interested parties are invited to attend and participate.

Representatives of the ECFVG and

We invite you to send news items for this feature.

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FAVE request that all input for the forum first be provided in writing. Limited time will also be available at this public forum for those who wish to make oral presentations or ask questions. Each oral presentation will be scheduled for a maximum of 15 minutes (to include questions and answers) and will be limited to those who have previously submitted written comments.

Interested persons/organizations should submit their written comments (limited to one page of text) to Dr. Susan Chadima, at 457 Foreside Road, Topsham, ME 04086. Comments may also be submitted via facsimile (207-729-8863) or e-mail (schaddvm@blazenetme.net), but must be followed with a mailed printed copy. Deadline for receipt is Wednesday, June 18.

If oral presentation time is desired, a request to that effect must be included when written comments are submitted. The request should include the presenter's name, mailing address, telephone and facsimile numbers, e-mail address, and professional affiliation.

Informational Resources

U.S. Pharmacopeia closes Veterinary Practitioners' Reporting Program

The United States Pharmacopeia has terminated its Veterinary Practitioners' Reporting Program. Beginning April 15, the organization stopped accepting adverse event reports, and April 30 was the last day of business. Even though the USP has received "very positive feedback" on the value of the program to the veterinary community, the organization evaluated all its current programs and activities and concluded it was not able to continue this program.

The AVMA has been in support of the USP program, but last year, the Council on Biologic and Therapeutic Agents formed a subcommittee to determine the best system for adverse event reporting. A mechanism is already available to report to government agencies and manufacturers, but the Adverse Event Reporting Subcommittee is seeking a better

way to disseminate clinically relevant and timely information back to practitioners.

On its Web site, www.usp.org, the USP tells where to file adverse event reports. The USP will continue to offer two other veterinary programs. The Veterinary Drug Information program features in-depth, evidence-based label and extralabel drug use information. In its Quality Standards for Veterinary Products, the USP provides drug quality standards for human and veterinary products. Also on its Web site, the organization offers additional resources as well as useful veterinary links.

The Veterinary Community

Sis appointed dean of St. George's veterinary school

Dr. Raymond Sis was appointed dean of St. George's University School of Veterinary Medicine on Grenada, effective April 1. He replaces Dr. David Hogg, founding dean of the veterinary school and new dean emeritus.

Dr. Sis came to the university in August 2001 to develop the Department of Preclinical Studies. While working at the university as a professor, Dr. Sis, a 1957 graduate of Kansas State University, served as associate dean of students for the veterinary school.

Prior to coming to St. George's, Dr. Sis spent more than 39 years teaching at Texas A&M and Iowa State universities.

Said St. George's University Chancellor Charles Modica, "We are fortunate to be able to name someone with the academic credentials and expertise of Ray Sis, and we look forward to what he will accomplish in his new role as dean."

From the AVMA

Call for AJVR reviewers

Members of the Board of Scientific Reviewers of the *American Journal of Veterinary Research* play a vital role in the peer review of manuscripts submitted for publication and in assisting the editors to maintain the high standards of the journal.

During its September 2003 meeting, the AVMA Council on Research's Committee on the *AJVR* will make appointments to the *AJVR* Board of Scientific Reviewers. Every year, the committee selects 20 to 25 individuals representing a variety of subject areas to serve on the board.

Readers who wish to be considered for appointment to the *AJVR* Board of Scientific Reviewers should contact Dr. Kurt Matushek at the AVMA office for an application form. Completed application forms must be returned by Aug. 15, 2003. Appointments are for a three-year term; new appointments will become effective Jan. 1, 2004. Individuals appointed to the board will use the AVMA's new online system for manuscript peer review.

HealthPlan Services to serve AVMA GHLIT policyholders

The AVMA Group Health and Life Insurance Trust is pleased to announce that it has finalized a partnership agreement with HealthPlan Services Inc. to provide certain services for the 34,000 AVMA members covered under the GHLIT insurance plans.

Beginning June 1, 2003, HealthPlan Services will provide all non-claims services for new and existing GHLIT members. These services involve areas such as invoicing, enrollment, eligibility, renewals, underwriting, claims reporting, sales, and marketing.

Previously, Harrington Benefit Services was administrator of those non-claims services. A strong partner of the GHLIT for 46 years, Harrington will continue to perform claims administration.

New York Life, an industry-leading insurance company, will remain the GHLIT insurance carrier. The provider network offered through FirstHealth will also remain the same, as will the prescription benefits provided through Advance PCS.

GHLIT Chair Jody Johnson, a veterinarian, said, "HPS brings the AVMA GHLIT new technology, fresh marketing ideas, and a portfolio of new pro-

acts that we can make available to meet our members' needs."

The potential new products that will be studied include a dental product, long-term care, and some form of staff coverage. In terms of fresh marketing ideas, the goal is to provide more educational pieces to help members be informed consumers of health care.

The new technology that HPS will bring includes the company's fully Web-enabled Total Administrative Solutions platform, which handles all aspects of individual billing, enrollment, eligibility, agent commissions, rating, and renewals. The platform's Web capabilities will enable agents and members to access real-time data 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

A mailing to GHLIT insureds will detail the services that HPS will provide as well as its Web-based platform, which will be transitioned in after June 1. AVMA members are encouraged to periodically access the GHLIT Web site through the Member Center of the AVMA Web site, www.avma.org, to familiarize themselves with the various administrative services as they are being added.

Education council schedules site visits

The AVMA Council on Education has scheduled site visits to colleges of veterinary medicine at five universities for the remainder of 2003.

Site visits are planned for Cornell University New York State College of Veterinary Medicine, Sept. 20-24; Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine, Oct. 11-15; Washington State University College of Veterinary Medicine with Oregon State University College of Veterinary Medicine, Oct. 30-Nov. 7; and the University of Saskatchewan Western College of Veterinary Medicine, Dec. 6-10.

The council welcomes written comments on these plans or the programs to be evaluated. Comments should be addressed to Dr. Donald G. Simmons, Director, AVMA Education

and Research Division, AVMA, 1931 N. Meacham Road, Suite 100, Schaumburg, IL 60173-4360.

Funding Announced

Radiation therapy research funded

The National Institutes of Health has awarded \$9 million to the University of Wisconsin-Madison to evaluate the effectiveness of helical tomotherapy, a new form of radiation therapy for cancer. Drs. Lisa Forrest and David Vail of the School of Veterinary Medicine will collaborate with physicians and physicists at the UW Comprehensive Cancer Center. To test the efficacy, conformal avoidance, and adaptive radiotherapy capabilities of this therapy, veterinarians will treat pet dogs with naturally occurring nasal tumors.

Researchers believe that helical tomotherapy will accurately deliver radiation specifically to the tumor, sparing critical adjacent normal tissues. This will allow veterinarians to gradually increase the dose, if necessary, and avoid toxic adverse effects.

Since canine tumors have biologic behavior similar to human head and neck cancers, the research could lay the groundwork for future human cancer treatments.

Colorado State receives gift for equine programs

A \$2.5 million gift to Colorado State University from the Walton Family Foundation Inc. will boost equine programs at the school.

One million dollars will be used to build a teaching facility at the Equine Reproductive Center and to build new laboratories in existing buildings.

"This generous gift allows us to augment the care we currently give horses in the reproductive program while providing better facilities for our students to study equine reproduction," said Dr. Ed Squires, a professor in the Department of Biomedical Sciences.

Additionally, \$500,000 will be used to build an equine magnetic resonance imaging center at the Equine Orthopaedic Research Laboratory

"This gift not only establishes the first equine MRI center in the world, it will further our abilities in musculoskeletal research that will forever improve the lives of horses and humans," said Dr. Wayne McIlwraith, a professor and director of the orthopedic center.

The remaining \$1 million will be used to fund support staff positions to aid faculty at the reproductive and orthopedic facilities.

Genome mapping projects receive funding

Ongoing efforts to map the genomes of pigs and cows just received a boost. The Department of Agriculture has recently awarded a group of University of Illinois researchers \$3 million over a five-year period to help create genetic maps of these two animals. In addition, the National Human Genome Research Institute recently pledged to give \$25 million to Texas A&M University and Baylor College of Medicine to map the bovine genome.

Across the world, other laboratories are working on sequencing the genomes of other animals, including cats, dogs, sheep, horses, and chickens.

Veterinary Research

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