SPOTLIGHT ON
Western University of Health Sciences Veterinary Medicine
Advancing animal health and welfare through research

Introducing canine lifestyle medicine and access to care in context of an interprofessional framework

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Evolution of the One Health research portfolio at Western University of Health Sciences (WesternU) aligns with our renowned interprofessional practice and education program that emphasizes team building, communication, ethics, roles and responsibilities. Our college strives to serve the community through clinical services and student-centered research.

True One Medicine Initiative

This collaborative program serves to advance species-spanning medicine through evidence-based research and ethical decision-making in science. Drs. Linde, Melgarejo and Tegzes take a systems approach to One Medicine that considers syndemics through the lens of the planetary health model. Optimizing health outcomes for populations and individuals, irrespective of species membership, requires sound interdisciplinary insight. Enhanced awareness of how adverse interactions between diseases with varying etiologies impact health outcomes is key to addressing root causes of disease in pursuit of health equity. Stewardship of natural resources is foundational to the health of all species and natural systems, which aligns with our college's reverence for life principle and the humanistic tradition at WesternU. Proven principles of lifestyle as medicine are applied to advance canine health, thus introducing a new field of 'canine lifestyle medicine'. We aim to improve canine and human health through translational research by studying naturally occurring diseases in dogs. Lifestyle medicine domains consider nutrition, exercise, sleep, love, stress, and exposures. Addressing these concepts can benefit both humans and dogs given their co-existence and shared environments. We recently completed a comprehensive study of canine plant-based nutrition (K9PBN), concluding that adult dogs maintain health when fed complete K9PBN over a year. Ongoing studies aim to assess K9PBN across the lifespan and in context of naturally occurring diseases. A center for healthy canine aging is being planned to study the influence of plant-based nutrition and physical activity on canine cognitive dysfunction as a naturally occurring animal model of human Alzheimer's disease.

Access to Veterinary Care

The increased caseload experienced by veterinarians due to the pandemic was documented in a 2020 survey of WesternU small animal preceptors. The study reported a concurrent expansion in telehealth, primarily applied to dermatology and triage, but failing to address all needs. This increased demand for veterinary care has intensified the impact of specialization and corporatization of the veterinary profession on access to care. Our college is well positioned to investigate these issues as Pomona counts over 20,500 households with pets and 20.7% of residents are below the federal poverty level. Supported by PetSmart Charities, Drs. Angliss, Hanselmann, and Griffon helped veterinary scholars survey pet owners, confirming that transportation and cost of care are main obstacles. This work led to investigation of geographic access to care in Southern California through a joint residency with the San Diego Humane Society, where resident Dr. Bunke aims to define and locate "veterinary deserts" in the region. This partnership also enables Dr. Diniz to focus on the cost of care, studying the influence of plasma transfer aimed at improving survival of kittens in shelters. Locally, other veterinary student scholars inventoried low-cost services offered by WesternU, identifying unmet needs in routine care, including dentistry. Dr. Griffon is concurrently leading a project supported by the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and PetSmart Charities, evaluating the outcomes of a low-cost alternative to treat cranial cruciate ligament disease. Collectively, these efforts are serving to improve the quality of care delivered collaboratively.

Advancing health through lifestyle medicine principles and improved access to care in an interprofessional framework. To learn more, visit www.westernu.edu/veterinary/spotlight.

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