

Why I Support Veterinary Research

When my husband Paul and I moved to Cary, North Carolina in 1995, our household included Tugger and Gypsy, two handsome Cavalier King Charles Spaniels. Our pets were healthy except both had well-documented heart murmurs. From age four, both dogs had been evaluated annually at the University of Pennsylvania Veterinary School as research subjects in a long-term study of heart disease among the breed.

Within two weeks of our arrival, Tugger and Gypsy were seen at the Veterinary Teaching Hospital. Under the care of cardiologists Drs. Clarke Atkins, Terry DeFrancesco, Bruce Keene and the VTH support staff, both dogs enjoyed full life spans despite their heart condition. To remember our pets, we established memorial bricks on the CVM Walk of Honor. Tugger's brick reads "Good Better Best" while the brick for the playful Gypsy is inscribed "Beloved Dingbat."

I found, however, that the memorial bricks were not enough to express my appreciation for the care my dogs received. Although my resources are limited, I wanted to establish a research fund. Why a research fund? To be effective in preventing as well as curing diseases in beloved pets, veterinarians need information—the real knowledge that comes from the precise, scientific, repeatable results of a successfully proven hypothesis. For example, the research involving Tugger and Gypsy unequivocally validated the hypothesis that mitral valve prolapse is the underlying cause of heart problems in Cavalier King Charles Spaniels.



Deborah Resnick with her current Cavalier King Charles Spaniels: Alfie (left) is five and Simon is six. Evaluated at the VTH, both neutered males have documented mitral valve leakage, but no detectable murmurs.

Cardiologists at the NC State College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM), of course, continue to study heart disease in companion animals. These clinical investigations include Dr. Atkins' Enalapril research, which demonstrates that the drug will not prevent or delay the onset of heart disease but it will prolong lives when administered alone or with other medications; Dr. DeFrancesco's ongoing studies on the use of Dalteparin and Warfarin in long-term heart disease therapy; and Dr. Keene's investigations that advocate a preventive approach: breed only animals that are symptom-free of heart disease at age five.

I wanted to support such research and, in April of 1998, helped launch the Fund for Discovery. In 2004, the Fund became linked with the Merck-Merial Summer Research Internship Program. The combined program blossomed under the direction of Dr. Jody Gookin and Dr. Sam Jones. By last summer, the program involved 22 first- and second-year veterinary students who were mentored by 16 faculty researchers.

In addition to laboratory research, the 10-week summer program involves an orientation session, a seminar series covering relevant research topics, and a half-day symposium at GlaxoSmithKline. Students conclude the internship program by giving oral summaries of their research efforts. The following spring, students have the additional opportunity to develop poster sessions on their work at the annual CVM Research Forum.

The CVM was well represented by eight participants at the National Veterinary Scholars Symposium on the National Institute of Health (NIH) campus in Bethesda, Maryland. Sponsored by the American Association of Veterinary Colleges, Merck-Merial, and the NIH, the symposium is a national forum for current veterinary and post-graduate students engaged in biomedical research. The national symposium will be hosted by the CVM in 2009.

My husband and I meet annually with the students and their faculty mentors at an informal supper sponsored by the Fund for Discovery. The students are articulate, poised, dedicated, and—as indicated by their oral presentations we attend—seemingly tireless. We are proud of and often awed by these students. We regard the mentors, who are dedicated to their students and work, as heroes.

The 2008 summer program will feature 31 mentors and 45 research topics, which will range from disease control and prevention in farm, domestic, and wild animals to the causes of coral reef decline. Co-sponsors for projects include the National Science Foundation, NIH, Disney, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Food and Drug Administration, American Kennel Club, the Army and Navy, and several pharmaceutical companies.

Merck-Merial funds provide less than one half of the program's annual budget and private support remains critical. My commitment to the Fund continues, of course, and the invitation to my 70th birthday party read "no gifts, but please consider a donation to the Fund for Discovery." According to our latest tallies, my family and friends contributed enough funds for one summer research student stipend. The Fund for Discovery is ready to receive additional online contributions through the North Carolina Veterinary Medical Foundation. Please visit <http://www.cvm.ncsu.edu/ncvmf> and click "Give Now" to lend your support.

- Deborah Resnick