

Animal lovers should be cheering for animal research — not opposing it

BY MATTHEW R. BAILEY

Scientists just discovered a drug that could save millions of dogs — and humans — from cancer. Veterinarians at Tufts University administered the experimental treatment to Dover, a 7-year old dog suffering from lymphoma. The cancer had caused him to go blind, and his days were numbered. In desperation, Dover's owner enrolled him in a clinical trial testing the early-stage therapy.

The results were amazing. The treatment restored Dover's sight overnight. Now, his cancer is in remission.

Such innovative research saves and improves animals' lives — and can lead to treatments for humans. Consequently, animal lovers support animal research. More than 43 million U.S. households have a dog. Over 31 million have a cat. Ninety percent of Americans consider their pets members of the family.

Unfortunately, our beloved pets — just like humans — are susceptible to a host of dangerous diseases. Every year, 12 million dogs and cats get cancer. Pets also suffer from diabetes, kidney disease, and heart disease.

Many scientists are developing more effective treatments and cures for these diseases. Consider how Universi-

ty of Pennsylvania scientists are saving dogs with osteosarcoma — a type of bone cancer. Researchers injected a genetically-modified bacteria into dogs that enabled their immune systems to identify and destroy tumors. Nearly seven in ten who received the therapy survived at least two years. Typically, only three in ten dogs with the disease live that long.

Or consider research conducted at the University of California, Davis. Experts recently tested a treatment for an incurable form of heart disease that afflicts one of every seven cats. The condition obstructs the left ventricle, thereby inhibiting proper blood flow and sometimes resulting in sudden death. Researchers gave five cats the new treatment, and the obstructions vanished.

In December, UC Davis and Kansas State University scientists teamed up to defeat feline infectious peritonitis — a fatal disease that plagues kittens. The disease was untreatable — until now. They gave 20 diseased cats a new antiviral drug. Almost half are already in remission.

Despite this, about half of Americans oppose animal testing. Many animal rights organizations want to eliminate animal research.

That's short-sighted. Many cats and dogs who participate in this research have run out of other treatment options. Experimental therapies are their only hope. And they may yield insights that can save millions of other animals from early

death.

Ending animal research would also prevent us from discovering cures for human diseases.

Human, dog, and cat immune systems respond to diseases in similar ways. So treatments for pets can save people's lives too. The California Veterinary Medical Association argues that "nearly every major medical breakthrough in the last 100 years has been achieved by research with animals."

Consider just one cancer treatment emerging from the University of Illinois. Years ago, scientists discovered a compound that had the potential to cure brain cancer. Last year, researchers tested the treatment on three dogs who had little chance of survival. All three experienced at least a 30-percent reduction in the size of their tumors. One dog's tumor disappeared entirely.

Now, scientists are evaluating the therapy's potential to cure brain cancer in humans. Currently, only 5 percent of people suffering from the most common malignant brain tumor will survive for five years. Research that started in animals could change that.

Thanks to animal research, the furry members of our families are living happier, healthier, and longer lives than ever before. Pet lovers should support such research.

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