



Research Investigates Common Cold, Which Often Leads to Death of Shelter Cats Morris Animal Foundation Also Readies to Fund Genetic Health and FIP Studies

Denver, Nov. 17, 2009 — Simple changes in shelter housing may inhibit the spread of feline upper respiratory infection (URI)—and save the lives of cats. This infection, which is similar to the common cold in humans, is cited among the top reasons for euthanasia of cats in shelters. Cats with URI may not be easy to adopt, and shelters do not always have the luxury of treating the animals or waiting until the disease runs its course. Research funded by Morris Animal Foundation’s Happy Healthy Cat Campaign, which celebrates its first anniversary today, suggests that stressful conditions dramatically increase the likelihood of infection. Fortunately, housing modifications reduce stress and decrease the spread of infection—making the difference between life and death for a shelter cat. Learn more about the research and the symptoms of URI at www.research4cats.org.

With Morris Animal Foundation funding, Dr. Kate Hurley, the director of the Koret Shelter Medicine Program at the University of California–Davis, is assessing disease incidence, cage layout and sanitation methods to determine how shelter housing affects stress and stress-related illnesses. Her research shows that prevalence of feline URI varies wildly across the country—with anywhere from 5 percent to 60 percent of shelter cats getting sick. Environmental risk factors explain some of the variation, and so far, shelters with the lowest URI rates seem to be those with high-quality housing for cats.

“Our hope is that we will find something that not only helps cats stay healthy but also helps them get out of shelters alive,” Hurley says.

Hurley’s project is one of three Helping Shelters Help Cats studies funded through the Foundation’s Happy Healthy Cat Campaign. An international team from the United States, Canada and Australia is also working to develop effective behavioral interventions to minimize the spread of URI. A third study, at the Ohio State University, will create a training program for shelter personnel, which will increase safety and comfort in the shelter. While these studies focus on shelters, findings are relevant to all pets that spend time in veterinary clinics, catteries or kennels.

Every dollar (up to \$500,000) donated to Helping Shelters Help Cats will be matched by an anonymous

donor. Based on this pledge, the Foundation recently sent out a new request for proposals for shelter-based research projects that will investigate feline infectious peritonitis, commonly known as FIP. Funding estimated at \$250,000 over three years will be available to study this infectious disease, which is almost always fatal.

Since the campaign's launch, the Foundation has also made progress on a major feline genomic research project, funded by a \$1 million pledge from Hill's Pet Nutrition Inc. Hill's also donated a database of groundbreaking genomic information that will be shared with feline health researchers worldwide. The Foundation's feline genomic advisory committee will work with medical technology company Illumina to develop a tool for using this database and genetic information from other partnering scientists.

"The development of these genetic tools will bring about critical breakthroughs in feline health issues such as diabetes, renal disease, endocrine disease, cancer, diseases that alter the immune system and more. These breakthroughs will help prevent disease in kittens and will help to develop better therapies for curing diseases in adult cats," says Patricia N. Olson, DVM, PhD, president and CEO of Morris Animal Foundation.

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