CAT SCRATCH DISEASE

TICKS CARRY BARTONELLA

Bartonella henselae, the bacterial agent of “cat scratch” disease, usually causes a mild fever in humans but can be serious or fatal in patients with a weakened immune system. At present there are indications, but no clear evidence, that humans can develop the disease from tick bites.

Bruno Chomel, professor of veterinary medicine at UC Davis, and graduate student Chao-Chin Chang, working with colleagues from the Santa Clara County Department of Health Services, tested ticks collected in Santa Clara County for Bartonella DNA. They reported in the April 2001 Journal of Clinical Microbiology that almost 20 percent of the collected ticks were infected with Bartonella species found in cats, dogs, cattle and other animals.

“At the least we can say that ticks carry Bartonella DNA and could be potential vectors,” says Dr. Chomel. More research is needed to find out the role of ticks and other animals in transmitting these bacteria between animals and to humans, he says.

BARTONELLA DNA

CAT SCRATCH DISEASE

CATS TOP DOGS AS COMPANIONS FOR AIDS PATIENTS

Cats beat out their canine counterparts when it comes to preventing loneliness and providing important social and emotional support for men with AIDS, according to a recent study by School of Veterinary Medicine researchers.

Through a survey of male pet owners with AIDS, animal behaviorist and sociologist Lynette Hart and colleagues found that cats did a better job of evoking affection, making their owners feel needed and serving as a source of stability.

“Much of the pleasure of dog ownership is associated with physical activities like taking walks or traveling, which can be too physically demanding for some people with AIDS,” Dr. Hart says. “It may well be that cats provide similar comfort and companionship, with less effort, and they can be kept entirely indoors.”

The survey is based on the responses of 60 male pet owners with AIDS, who replied to a questionnaire sent to 500 clients of Pets Are Wonderful Support (PAWS), a San Francisco community organization that provides pet-care assistance.

“Survey responses suggest that cats complement, rather than replace, support provided by relationships with friends and family,” Dr. Hart adds. This study builds on a growing body of research indicating that companion animals offer people strong social and psychological support that in some instances also translates into overall health benefits.

Emotional support is of particular concern for AIDS patients, who may be dealing with shortened life expectancy, social stigma, and diminishing social and financial resources. For example, previous research indicates that HIV-positive men who are frequently depressed are at higher risk of developing clinical AIDS.

USDA GRANT SUPPORTS INTERACTIVE CASE STUDIES

WEB DELIVERS LESSONS IN INTERNATIONAL ANIMAL HEALTH

Three new Web-based lessons encourage veterinary students to “travel” to international destinations, test their diagnostic skills, and explore new career paths in livestock and wildlife health topics.

Actual cases, including veterinary student experiences sponsored by the school’s Office of International Programs, are the basis of the following problem-solving modules:

- Follow Saul Morfin (DVM ’99) as he unravels a costly reproduction problem at a dairy cooperative in Mexico.
- Trace the cause of sick horses and cattle found by Jonathan Arzt (DVM/MPVM ’99) on mysterious Rapa Nui (Easter Island).
- Join veterinarian Dewald Keet at Kruger National Park, Republic of South Africa, to improve management of bovine tuberculosis in Cape buffalo and wildlife.

Students are guided through the processes of initial investigation, obtaining a medical history, examination, diagnosis and development of a treatment plan. The case studies URL is http://www.calf.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/html/intl.html.

Supported by the USDA Higher Education Challenge Grants Program, the exercises were developed by school faculty experts and collaborating veterinarians and scientists in Mexico, South America and Africa. Patricia Conrad, principal investigator, supervised the Kruger National Park lesson. Technical components—video clips, maps, clinical images, and an interactive question-and-answer format—were crafted for the modules by staff members of the school’s Computer-Assisted Learning Facility.

International Programs Director David Hird says, “Travel broadens horizons, and all veterinarians face novel situations. These exercises provide engaging case material on a variety of topics and offer problem-solving tools that students can use throughout their careers.”

Plans are underway with Wildlife Information Network, a non-profit organization based in the United Kingdom, to produce compact discs of the program for distribution to wildlife veterinarians and veterinary schools worldwide.