2003 Grant Awards
George and Phyllis Miller Trust
San Francisco Foundation
Two studies funded for a total of $45,174

FIV Vaccination: effects on FIV diagnostic testing
$25,020; James Richards, Cornell University; Cynda Crawford, University of Florida-Gainesville; Dorothee Bienzle, University of Guelph

Feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) affects from 1% to 30% of cats worldwide. The infection is incurable and results in severe immunosuppression, cancer, and wasting syndromes. The diagnosis of FIV infection in cats has relied on detection of virus-specific antibodies in blood. Until recently, the only method for prevention of FIV infection was identification of infected cats followed by euthanasia or separation from uninfected cats. In July 2002, the first vaccine became available for prevention of FIV. Vaccinated cats produce antibodies that are indistinguishable from those produced by naturally infected cats, thereby invalidating currently used antibody-based diagnostic assays. The polymerase chain reaction (PCR) assay has been proposed as an alternative method for determining whether FIV antibody-positive cats are infected or vaccinated. However, we recently completed a study that revealed the diagnostic performance of FIV PCR tests offered by commercial laboratories is poor. Virus culture is accurate, but is too costly and technically demanding to be offered as a routine test. Consequently, there is no reliable diagnostic assay currently available for verification of the true status of FIV antibody-positive cats. Recently, we have developed a PCR assay that accurately identified uninfected and infected cats in preliminary studies. The objectives of this proposal are: 1) to develop a cost-effective and timely virus culture assay for routine use, and 2) to determine the overall diagnostic performance of the new PCR assay on blood samples from uninfected and FIV-infected cats.

Non-Traditional Housing, Stress, and Rates of Upper Respiratory Disease n Cats in an Animal Shelter
$20,154; Janet Scarlett, Katherine Houpt, Pamela Perry; Cornell University

Many animal shelters are replacing traditional cages in their adoption areas with non-traditional "kitty condos" or communal rooms. Proponents of non-traditional housing cite reduced stress, a more natural environment, increased adoptions, and reduced incidence of upper respiratory tract disease (URTD) as advantages. Others point to difficulties in cleaning, stress for shy cats, outbreaks of infectious disease and problems with disease and behavior detection. Scientifically designed studies comparing the stress levels, behavior, and risk of URTD in traditional versus non-traditional housing have not been conducted. The objective of this study is to evaluate the risks and benefits associated with the type of housing in an animal shelter.

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