

Working for Westie health through research and communication

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The Westie Foundation of America, Inc. is a nonprofit corporation, recognized by the IRS as a 501 (C) (3) organization. The mission of the Foundation is to provide financial aid and other support for medical research in order to benefit the health and quality of life of West Highland White Terriers; and to further develop and communicate information regarding the health, care, breeding and quality of life of Westies to Westie owners, Westie breeders and veterinarians.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Joint Human/Canine Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis Conference, organized and hosted by the Westie Foundation and held in Lafayette, IN on October 9 and 10, has been very well received and has generated some national publicity. Shortly after the conference ended, a press release (printed elsewhere in this newsletter) was issued, and was picked up by a number of newspapers and television stations scattered around the country. In addition, an excellent article on the conference, entitled "Terriers Join Fight Against Killer Disease in Humans" (which is printed elsewhere in this issue of the newsletter) appeared at the end of December on the websites of AOL News, MSN News, Yahoo News, and the websites of Business Week, Forbes, US News and World Report, the Washington Post, and the online newsletters of the National Institutes of Health and the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services.

The entire day and a half conference was recorded on DVD (six DVDs in the set) and may be purchased for \$35 (which includes domestic U.S. shipping). If you are interested in purchasing the set. Send a check for \$35, payable to the Westie Foundation of America, to Wayne Kompare, 4836 Bay Shore Rd., Sarasota, FL 34234. If you need it to be shipped outside of the U.S., contact me for a cost quote, by providing the name of the destination country.

As output of the conference, we hope to have a joint conference white paper, to be published in a scientific journal later this year, and to get several grant proposals on the canine side out of the follow-on work of the conference. These would potentially cover the Phenotype of the disease (detailed medical definition), Epidemiology (covering age, gender, where affected dogs reside, etc.) and Pathology (study and diagnosis of the disease through examination of organs, tissues, cells, etc.). All of this medical work already exists on the human side; it's really on the canine

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Terriers Join Fight Against a Killer Disease in Humans

'Westies' breed is also prone to pulmonary fibrosis, which has no cure

By E.J. Mundell
HealthDay Reporter

THURSDAY, Dec. 27 (HealthDay News) -- A feisty breed of terrier could stop scientists from barking up the wrong tree as they research a deadly lung disease in humans.

The illness, called idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF), affects 128,000 Americans, is typically fatal within three years of diagnosis, and kills more than 40,000 people in the United States annually -- a death toll equivalent to that of breast cancer.

A fatal condition that looks remarkably like IPF also strikes the diminutive West Highland White terrier ("Westie"), however. And recently, medical scientists from the human and veterinarian worlds met for the first time to share information and pool resources against a mysterious killer.

"People may be a little startled at first to learn about this idea -- 'You're kidding me, you

actually think there's promise in studying this dog to help my Dad with this disease?' And the answer is -- 'Yes'," said Mark Shreve, chief operating officer of the patient advocacy



West Highland White Terrier. Photo courtesy American Kennel Club

group Coalition for Pulmonary Fibrosis, based in San Jose, Calif.

Because the Westie is so tightly bred, and because the illness progresses faster in dogs than humans, it is conceivable that dog-based research might yield valuable clues to the genetics or environmental factors that trigger pulmonary fibrosis in both species, experts explained.

"And if it transpires that it is the same disease, then obviously the options are limitless as to how we can look at information from dogs and use it to understand the disease in humans and vice versa," said Dr. Brendan Corcoran, director of the Hospital for Small Animals at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, and a pioneer in researching pulmonary fibrosis in Westies.

According to Shreve, most people find it hard to believe that a disease like IPF even exists amid the wonders of modern medicine.

"We are dealing here with one of the few diseases left on the planet for which there are no proven causes and no treatments," he said.

Idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis occurs spontaneously, although certain factors -- such as smoking or exposure to airborne toxins -- do raise risks for the illness. "IPF is a



progressive scarring process in the lungs that gradually robs a person of the ability to breathe,” Shreve explained. Some sort of signaling seems to go awry at the cellular level, he said, converting normal, expansive lung tissue into stiff, fibrotic scar tissue.

“Once it starts in patients with IPF, your body just never sends a signal to stop that scar tissue from being produced,” Shreve said. “This scar tissue is obviously not lung tissue that is able to process oxygen.”

There have so far been very few promising leads in discovering the root causes of IPF, said Dr. Jesse Roman, one of the country’s leading researchers in the disease and a professor of medicine at Emory University in Atlanta.

“Studies do suggest very specific [cellular] pathways, and there’s a number of molecules that everybody is tuned into,” he said. “But how you block them and how they relate to what happens in humans, that’s less clear.”

So, scientists are turning to creative new ways of looking at IPF.

Cross-talk between scientists worldwide led to the first-ever summit on the disease that included both veterinary and

human medical researchers. The meeting was held in October on the campus of Purdue University in West Lafayette, Ind., and was attended by Corcoran, Roman and others. It was sponsored by the Westie Foundation of America and the American Kennel Club (AKC) Canine Health Foundation.

Westies, which grow to just under a foot in length, are described by the AKC as “courageous and self-reliant, but friendly.”

“They’re a very popular pet because of their size and their nature,” Corcoran said.

However, pulmonary fibrosis does pop up in the breed with regularity, first revealing itself as excessive panting and shortness of breath. The illness also tends to develop in the terriers’ late middle-age (about eight or nine years), mimicking its typical onset in humans at about age 50 to 60.

Westies inevitably succumb to the lung fibrosis about a year and a half after their diagnosis, Corcoran said.

Still, “there’s still the contentious issue of whether this is the same disease as occurs in humans,” he said. The exact prevalence of the disease among Westies is also

unclear, he added. That means the first aim of Westies-centered research will be epidemiological -- studying disease prevalence and gathering a core of dogs and their owners that researchers might follow going forward.

Getting postmortem samples of canine lung tissue will also be crucial to a better understanding of the causes of the disease, Corcoran said. But that has its own challenges, he added.

“Getting owners to volunteer their dogs for necropsy is always problematic,” he said. In fact, it’s often “harder in many instances to get lung pathology samples from dogs than it is from humans,” Corcoran said.

“However, one of our plans is to try and build up a group of concerned owners who will volunteer to donate their dog when that day arrives. We’ve been having some discussions on that already with our colleagues in America,” Corcoran said. “Hopefully, the more publicity that we get with this condition, the more we may get owners coming forward and volunteering their dogs for research.”

Corcoran and the other experts said that a cure for IPF is definitely *not* around the corner -- the disease has been as

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Man's Best Friend May Open Door to Understanding Deadly Lung Disease that Claims Thousands Each Year in Human and Animal Populations

Human and Canine Respiratory Specialists Meet for First Time to Discuss Joint Research Efforts in Deadly Lung Disease

In what is a growing trend among research in the United States and the U.K., animal and human researchers are collaborating to find answers to deadly diseases that affect both species. Researchers from internationally recognized medical, veterinary and academic institutions joined together for the first human/canine conference on fibrotic lung disease.

The group met in Lafayette, Ind. this week in an effort to examine potential collaborative opportunities to research the disease. The researchers joined to investigate the possibility of finding faster paths to treatment in the human form of the disease which has confounded researchers for decades as well as identifying, diagnosing and treating affected dogs.

"We brought together thought leaders on both the human and animal sides of fibrotic lung disease as a groundbreaking opportunity to look at this devastating disease and its impact on West Highland White Terriers (Westies) and discuss how science in animals and humans can work together to combat it," said Wayne Kompare, president of the Westie Foundation of America, the group that hosted the two-day meeting along with the American Kennel Club Canine Health Foundation, a charitable organization that funds health research in dogs. Morris Animal Foundation, also an animal research funding organization, participated in the meeting, as well.

Similarities between human fibrotic lung disease and fibrotic lung disease that affects dogs

are profound. Dogs known to be more commonly affected by the deadly lung disease characterized by extensive and progressive scarring in the lungs are Westies, a loveable companion popular in the U.S. and the U.K. It is currently believed some terriers may be at significant risk for the disease.

"We are optimistic about the potential the Westies may present for learning more about the natural history of fibrotic lung disease. It is collaborations like this that will help move things forward for both humans and animals and we eagerly await the opportunity to participate in this research," said Mark Shreve, chief executive officer for the Coalition for Pulmonary Fibrosis, a research, advocacy and support organization for the human disease.



The disease in Westies and some other breeds of dog appears to be very similar to the disease that affects humans and claims 40,000 lives each year in the U.S., the same as breast cancer. The main symptoms of the disease, including shortness of breath and a dry cough, also seem to be consistent between humans and dogs. There is no known cause, no approved treatment and no cure for either the human or animal versions of the disease.

Because dogs age at a rate that is believed to be about seven times the human rate of aging, and fibrotic lung disease tends to be most common later in life, human scientists are optimistic about the opportunities studying the animal version of the diseases may present for finding treatments in both humans and animals. At the same time, veterinarians are excited about the opportunity to learn from human research to better diagnose and treat the dogs that are dying from fibrotic lung disease.

“We are certainly encouraged about the opportunity this type of comparative research presents,” said Jesse Roman, M.D., a human fibrotic lung disease expert from Emory University Medical Center who attended the meeting. “It is known that dog physiology is

similar to human physiology and this combined effort may provide findings that will be important to both bodies of knowledge.”

“There is no question we in veterinary medicine can learn from our colleagues in human medicine; their understanding of fibrotic lung disease is much more developed than what we know about the canine disease,” said Kurt Williams, DVM, PhD, DACVP, Assistant Professor of Pathobiology and Diagnostic Investigation from Michigan State University, who also attended the meeting. “We believe that researching this disease in animals may move the field forward at a much faster pace than is possible in human medicine.”

Combined dog and human research is a growing trend in the scientific community due to the benefits for both. At nearby Purdue University, scientists are currently researching cancer in dogs and applying what they’re learning to human research and vice versa.

In addition to Dr. Roman and Dr. Williams, Medical and veterinary specialists attending the first-time meeting included renowned human respiratory disease experts Kevin Brown, MD, from National Jewish Medical & Research Center and

Amy Olson, MD from National Jewish Medical & Research Center and the University of Colorado, Keith Meyer, MD, from the University of Wisconsin-Madison Medical Center, and David Perlman, MD, from University of Minnesota Medical Center, Timothy Weaver, MD, of Cincinnati Children’s Hospital, as well as veterinarians Elizabeth Rozanski, DVM, from Tufts University, Brendan Corcoran, MVB, DipPharm, PhD, MRCVS, of University of Edinburgh, Scotland, Laurent Couetil, DVM, from Purdue University and Richard Vulliet, DVM, PhD of University of California-Davis.

Plans for the human/canine fibrotic lung disease research include the creation of the first published white paper on this aspect of fibrotic lung disease as well as the creation of diagnostic guidelines and standards of care for animals and an animal tissue bank to study the pathology and epidemiology of the disease.

About the Coalition for Pulmonary Fibrosis

The Coalition for Pulmonary Fibrosis (CPF) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, founded in 2001 to accelerate research efforts leading to a cure for idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF), while educating,

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supporting, and advocating for the community of patients, families, and medical professionals fighting this disease. For more information please visit www.coalitionforpf.org or call (888) 222-8541

About Morris Animal Foundation (MAF)

Morris Animal Foundation, established in 1948, is dedicated to funding research that protects, treats and cures companion animals and wildlife. MAF has been at the forefront of funding breakthrough research studies benefiting animals in some 100 countries, spanning all seven continents on earth. For more information, call (800) 243-2345, or visit www.MorrisAnimalFoundation.org.

About the Westie Foundation of America

The mission of the Westie Foundation of America is to provide financial aid and other support for medical research in order to benefit the health and quality of life of West Highland White Terriers; and, to further develop and communicate information regarding the health, care, breeding and quality of life of Westies to Westie owners, Westie breeders and veterinarians. For more information visit www.westiefoundation.org.

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tenacious in keeping its secrets as, well, a terrier.

But Westies may be just the foe in the fight against IPF requires. Corcoran pointed out that the dogs' tight breeding means genetic research could yield important clues. And their shorter lifespan -- a seventh of that of humans -- means scientists can watch the disease in "fast-forward," which might also speed research.

Westies are also free of certain confounding factors, such as smoking, that often muddle human research. "The dogs might turn out to have a very pure form of the disease that allows you to investigate the disease itself and not worry about other factors," Corcoran noted.

Given all of this, "why wouldn't you look at a Westie and research how the disease progresses?" said patient-advocate Shreve.

"We think it's a very creative approach to trying to help out humans," he said, "and our patients don't really have the patience to hang around waiting for a miracle.

More information

To learn much more about IPF, visit the Coalition for Pulmonary Fibrosis.

SOURCES: *Brendan Corcoran, Ph.D., professor and director, Hospital for Small Animals, University of Edinburgh, Scotland; Jesse Roman, M.D., professor, medicine, and director, pulmonary allergy and CCM, Emory University, Atlanta; Mark Shreve, chief operating officer, Coalition for Pulmonary Fibrosis, San Jose, Calif.*

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side where much more work needs to take place next, before we can truly establish a comparative medical effort between the two sides.

In addition to the availability of the IPF Conference DVDs, we also have a DVD available for purchase of Dr. John Robertson's Montgomery seminar presentation "Dealing with Cancer in Dogs: What Cancer Means to You and Your Westie". This DVD is available for a check for \$10, payable to the Westie Foundation of America, and sent to me at the address above. The amount also includes shipping to anywhere in the domestic U.S.

Finally, don't forget to nominate your veterinarian for our Westie Docs program, assuming you are happy with him/her, and feel they would be a good choice for new or transplanted Westie owners. Nomination forms are available on our website at <http://www.westiefoundation.org/westiedocs.htm>.

Thanks again for your generosity and support.

Wayne Kompare



Health Committee Update

Kay McGuire, DVM, MS

Our many research studies that were listed in the Super Summer Newsletter are progressing. We are excited that the Atopic Dermatitis study conducted by Dr. Thierry Olivery at NCSU is now beginning the linkage study to search for the DNA marker. They have collected skin biopsies from affected animals and we are now providing biopsies from unaffected dogs. Again, we want to thank many of you that provided pedigrees and DNA samples. This is again the way that, we as a team; will make a difference to the future health of our breed.

Our newest study on Legg-Calves Perthes is being conducted by Dr. Keith Murphy from Texas A&M University Canine Genetic s Laboratory. Drs. Kate Tsai and Alison Starr are assisting with the research. This study is a hereditary evaluation of Legg-Calves Perthes Disease (LCPD) in the Westie. If information is identified, hopefully it will also apply to the same condition that affects humans. The initial

funding is for sample collection and complex segregation analysis (CSA) to determine the mode of transmission. The linkage studies look for genetic "signposts" or SNPS' located near disease-controlling genes. **Pedigrees and blood samples for DNA are needed to try to locate gene markers. All information is of course confidential.** If you are interested in participating in this study, or if you have any questions regarding this project, please contact Dr. Alison Starr at astarr@cvm.tamu.edu. Supplies and shipping expenses will be provided (most veterinarians are willing to draw blood at no cost if they understand it is for research use).

The Westie Foundation is pleased that our breed is now included in the Canine Health Information Center. The initial health clearances that are recommended are hip, eye and patella clearances. All information and forms can be found at www.caninehealthinfo.org.



LEGACY ALLIANCE



earn your wings.

THE **WESTIE FOUNDATION OF AMERICA** WAS FOUNDED IN 1997.

The mission of the Foundation is to provide financial aid and other support through medical research benefiting the health and quality of life of Westies and, to develop and communicate information regarding health, care, breeding and the quality of life of Westies to pet owners, breeders and the veterinarians who treat Westies.

The Westie Foundation of America is a tax exempt, non-profit corporation. Your tax deductible *gift* or *bequest* to the Foundation's Legacy Alliance endowment program will help to further the goals the Foundation has set. All assets left to the endowment fund remain in the endowment fund into perpetuity. Only the interest income derived from your gift or bequest will be spent on health research and education.

We encourage you to visit our website, <http://www.westiefoundation.org> to view the results of Westie health and educational challenges the Foundation has met thus far.

The Westie Foundation of America is extremely grateful to those of you who have chosen to further the health and well being of our wonderful breed by contributing to the Legacy Alliance endowment fund. If you are considering a gift or bequest to the Westie Foundation of America, please allow us to send you a packet with information that may be of help to you.

Legacy Alliance of the Westie Foundation of America, Inc.

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