THERE'S HOPE. Trilly, a 9-year-old Gordon setter, is part of a cancer vaccine study at the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Veterinary Medicine.

Photo courtesy University of Wisconsin School of Veterinary Medicine

ONCOLOGY

Clinical Trial Tests Universal Vaccine Against Canine Cancer

A 9-year-old Gordon setter named Trilly and a 9-year-old rat terrier mix named Norton were the first 2 dogs to receive a vaccine intended to protect them from cancer.

"We're testing a totally novel way of creating an anti-cancer immune response," says David Vail, a professor and board-certified oncologist at the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Veterinary Medicine. "The holy grail would be to prevent cancer as opposed to waiting for it to start and then treating it."

Cancer is the number 1 cause of illness and death in the aging dog population, with approximately 1 out of every 3 dogs affected and 6 million new cancer diagnoses made in dogs each year.

More than 800 patients are enrolled in the Vaccination Against Canine Cancer Study, making it the largest clinical trial conducted to date for canine cancer. The vaccine will target several cancers common to dogs, including lymphoma, osteosarcoma, hemangiosarcoma, and mastocytomas. The UW School of Veterinary Medicine is 1 of 3 participating institutions.

"The vaccine may not be effective, but this is probably the only approach to this type of vaccine, so we feel we have to try it," says Stephen Albert Johnston, professor

and director of the Center for Innovations in Medicine at Arizona State University, who developed the technology behind the vaccine. "The implications of success would be quite large for dogs and people."

The trial is slated to run over 5 years. Cancer-free, healthy dogs between the ages of 6 and 10 will be randomized to receive either a series of the investigational vaccine or placebo vaccines. (In fact, researchers don't know which version Trilly and Norton received.) Two sets of vaccines will be given every 2 weeks, for a total of 4 treatments, and then annually. ■

ANIMAL RESEARCH

USDA Says Cats Will No Longer Be Used in Deadly Research Tests

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Research Service (ARS) ended a controversial food-tasting testing practice that has been responsible for the deaths of more than 3000 cats since 1982. USDA officials said toxoplasmosis research will no longer use cats to study the effects of the parasite.

The ARS used kittens to study toxoplasmosis by feeding them raw meat, and putting the animals down once the parasite harvested in their system and their infected feces had been obtained.

According to the USDA and Centers for Disease Control, toxoplasmosis is the leading cause of death due to food-borne illness in the United States, though its rates have been cut in half since the ARS began its research into the disease.

Lawmakers in Congress had been pressuring the USDA to end the testing. Congressman Jimmy Panetta (D-CA) and Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) sponsored the Kittens in Traumatic Testing Ends Now Act (KITTEN Act) that sought to end taxpayer funded experiments on cats. "I commend the USDA for their decision to end this type of testing on kittens," Panetta's office said in a statement.

The USDA said no cats have been infected for research purposes on the premises of any ARS facility since September 2018. ■

ORGANIZATION NEWS

AVMA Task Force Will Look at Ways to Promote the Utilization of Veterinary Technicians

An American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) task force has been convened to develop a plan to improve veterinary technician utilization. Among the issues the group will tackle are how to encourage the consistent use of credentialed veterinary technicians as part of a health care team, the lack of recognition for technicians, the differences between employees trained on the job and credentialed technicians, and the high turnover rates, low job satisfaction, and low wages for technicians.

The 10-member task force has until Dec. 31, 2019, to provide a report to the AVMA board of directors. TVP