



media release

Thursday 19 February 2015

Photo call: Official cheque presentation of the AHT repaying the loan to the Kennel Club.
Thursday 5 March 2015, 11am, Hall 3, Stand 55, Crufts.

ANIMAL HEALTH TRUST REPAYS £1.5M LOAN TO THE KENNEL CLUB AND CELEBRATES SUCCESS IN CANCER TREATMENT AND RESEARCH

The Animal Health Trust (AHT) has successfully fulfilled its commitment to the Kennel Club and repaid, on time, an interest-free £1.5 million loan in full. The loan was given to the AHT in 2011 to help build the pioneering Kennel Club Cancer Centre at the AHT, designed to treat dogs, cats and horses. The loan significantly accelerated the build and development time of the centre which was officially opened by HRH The Princess Royal in November 2012, just one year after the loan was received.

To date, more than 130 dogs from 20 breeds with 15 types of cancer have been treated in the Kennel Club Cancer Centre at the AHT, near Newmarket, Suffolk. In total, the Kennel Club Cancer Centre at the AHT has administered more than 1,300 doses of radiation in cancer treatment since opening, with 2015 set to be the busiest year yet as the centre's reputation grows and caseload increases.

The AHT is a charity known for both its specialist veterinary services and veterinary research, with a dedicated canine cancer research programme involving clinical oncologists, molecular biologists and geneticists, working together on one site. The addition of the purpose built cancer centre, equipped with a linear accelerator and CT scanner to administer radiotherapy treatment, enables the AHT to significantly further veterinary and scientific knowledge of cancer in dogs whilst offering the full spectrum of cancer treatments; surgery, chemotherapy and radiotherapy from one specialist centre, which is less stressful for patients and owners.

The centre is increasing the AHT's clinical knowledge of how best to treat and diagnose cancer, with many clinicians undertaking peer-reviewed research projects based on their clinical observations to further veterinary medicine. At the same time, the AHT's scientists work on research projects to better understand, and fight, the disease in dogs from all possible avenues.

Dr. Mark Vaudin, CEO of the AHT, said: "The Kennel Club were incredibly generous to give us the interest-free loan which enabled us to complete the build of the cancer centre in record time. We're proud to repay the loan as promised and to have treated so many patients in a short space of time.

"Continued support from the Kennel Club Charitable Trust has also enabled us to make incredible progress in the last two years in our cancer research programme. We're hopeful that in the future we'll be even closer to developing tests which will help vets to more accurately diagnose and treat cancers in dogs."

In the last year, scientists at the AHT have been evaluating whether archived tumour biopsies, normally only used by pathologists for making a diagnosis, can be useful in 'molecular genetic' investigations. It is hoped that the study of these tumour biopsies will help to identify molecules which may help us understand how tumours behave.

The study has focussed on uveal melanomas, the most common primary eye cancer, affecting all dog breeds. At present the only way to predict whether this tumour will spread is to remove an affected eye, or a significant part of an eye, for examination by a pathologist. A consequence of this is that eyes are sometimes unnecessarily removed from dogs found to have 'benign' tumours.

The research study has identified several 'biomarkers' that are present in different quantities in uveal melanomas that spread and tumours that didn't spread. As it is possible to measure the levels of these biomarkers in a small number of tumour cells, which could be collected from an eye using a fine needle, it is hoped that this research could lead to the development of a minimally-invasive test to predict if a uveal melanoma will spread. A fine needle aspirate-based test already exists for uveal melanomas in humans. In addition to preventing the unnecessary removal of eyes affected by benign tumours, the availability of such a test for dogs would further benefit animal welfare as a patient would not have to undergo anaesthesia and surgery in order to provide a tumour biopsy.

The pilot study using uveal melanoma biopsies has been made possible through use of the GeneAtlas System, funded by the Kennel Club Charitable Trust. Further studies are planned at the AHT using this methodology to analyse oral melanomas and mast cell tumours, two of the most common cancers in dogs. In the future this research could lead to the development of improved prognostic tests, assisting clinicians to decide on the most appropriate treatment for a dog affected by one of these cancers.

Professor Steve Dean, Chairman of the Kennel Club, said: "The Kennel Club Cancer Centre at the Animal Health Trust carries out remarkable work to benefit dog health and we are glad we were able to assist by providing the loan. The number of dogs already helped by the Centre is extremely encouraging and we look forward to the further strides it is taking in terms of researching and treating cancer in dogs.

"We are thankful that the financial support provided by the Kennel Club has now been repaid and we look forward to continuing to work with the team at the AHT to further improve dog health."

Dr Mark Vaudin, added "The Kennel Club is a fantastic partner to our vital work. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank all of the Breed Clubs, breeders and dog owners who give so generously, both financially and in the form of samples, to the AHT's research. Your continued support helps us to make this progress in the fight against cancer in dogs."

To find out more about the AHT's work to fight cancer in animals please visit www.aht.org.uk

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Additional notes:

- The **Animal Health Trust** is an independent charity, employing over 200 scientists, vets and support workers. It aims to improve the health and welfare of horses, dogs and cats through research. It also provides specialist referral services and continuous education to vets. Visit our website at www.aht.org.uk
- The Kennel Club is the largest organisation in the UK devoted to dog health, welfare and training. Its objective is to ensure that dogs live healthy, happy lives with responsible owners. Visit the website at www.thekennelclub.org.uk
- The Kennel Club Cancer Centre at the AHT has been made possible thanks to donations from Tom Scott, The Margaret Giffen Charitable Trust and The Jean Richardson Charitable Trust among many others, along with a loan from The Kennel Club.
- The loan is the latest in a series of link-ups between the Kennel Club and the AHT. The Kennel Club Charitable Trust is currently in the second year of a five year £1.2 million grant to the AHT to fund the Kennel Club Genetics Centre at the AHT, which is investigating the genetic causes of a number of inherited diseases in dogs and developing DNA tests to check for these. There will be considerable synergy with this work and research into cancer.
- The Kennel Club Charitable Trust has donated more than £8 million to help improve the lives of dogs since it was established in 1987. The Trust awards grants to welfare organisations which make a difference to dogs' lives, such as Safe and Sound, and also provides financial support to canine scientific research and support charities.