

New Bolton Will Organize International Tissue Bank for Laminitis Research

In recent months, progress has been made in building the foundation for the fight against laminitis, with the addition of Professor Christopher Pollitt — BVSc, PhD, a world renowned laminitis researcher, as research director for the Laminitis Institute at Penn Vet. He joins Dr. James Orsini, director of the institute, and Dr. Hannah Galantino-Homer, who serves as the senior lead investigator.

"This international effort in the fight against laminitis, organized by Drs. Galantino-Homer, Orsini and Pollitt, will ensure that research information is shared and sustained, expanding our base of knowledge," said Dr. Gary Althouse, New Bolton Chair of Clinical Studies. "We are very excited about the opportunities the Laminitis Institute at Penn Vet offers for increasing our understanding of the disease in concert with development of successful clinical treatments and preventive strategies."

In addition to coordinating the efforts of researchers from all around the world, including

his own Laminitis Research Unit at the University of Queensland in Australia, Dr. Pollitt is leading the Institute's first initiative, which is the creation of a tissue bank at New Bolton Center.

"My vision for this Institute is for it to be available to all genuine scientists studying laminitis from anywhere in the world; a truly international, collaborative, research push," said Dr. Pollitt. "I see this Institute becoming

a Center for people to come to, and understand laminitis, and for people to go from here to the collaborations we have developed internationally, generating new information and new knowledge so that we have real evidence on which to base our clinical treatments, preventive strategies."

Dr. James Orsini, in his role as director of the Institute, is responsible for setting strategic direction. "Research is the driving force, and the rationale for bringing Dr. Pollitt on board to work with Dr. Hannah Galantino-Homer and other scientists," said Dr. Orsini. "The research

is what is going to translate into improved clinical care and our expanded understanding of what causes laminitis. We want people to know that the Laminitis Institute is up and running, and that we have a mission and vision for the future — we are committed to making sure the next generation of researchers/clinicians see laminitis as an important area for investigation and even solving the puzzle."

Dr. Galantino-Homer recently received a three-year grant from the Bernice Barbour Foundation to establish and maintain a Laminitis Discovery Database, which will include the tissue bank of clinical and experimental samples described by Dr. Pollitt, as well as information on data obtained from these samples and a database of information on antibodies for equine disease research. Dr. Julie Engles, a veterinary pathologist at Penn Vet, is documenting the disease status of banked tissues as well as conducting her own studies on the pathology of chronic laminitis. Dr. Galantino-Homer's collab-

orative Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation project with Drs. Orsini, Pollitt, Dr. Rebecca Carter (post doctoral fellow) and Dr. Neal Rubinstien of Penn Medical Center is ongoing. This project is investigating the gene and protein expression profiles of two models of laminitis. An expert in equine genomics, Dr. Bhanu Chowdhary of Texas A&M University, recently joined this project. Dr. Galantino-

Homer's Laminitis Laboratory continues to study equine basal epithelial cells from the lamellae and to develop an in vitro culture system for the study of equine laminitis in collaboration with Dr.

Makoto Senoo, an epithelial stem cell biologist at Penn Vet.

"My hopes for these three projects are that the Laminitis Discovery Database will provide us and others with the samples and information needed to conduct collaborative research, that the Grayson project will increase our understanding of the disease process and disease biomarkers, and that the stem cell studies will provide a better understanding of normal and diseased lamellar biology and a laboratory model for testing hypotheses at the cellular and molecular level without inducing laminitis in live horses," said Dr. Galantino-Homer. 

Rotational Grazing Demonstration Site Opens

The University of Maryland's 5.5 acre equine rotational grazing demonstration site is set to open its gates in April 2009 to a small herd of grazing horses and hundreds of horse farm operators interested in learning about pasture best management practices. The site, located at the Central Maryland Research and Education Center in Ellicott City, MD, features four rotational pastures, a laneway that guides horses into a sacrifice area and two smaller paddocks that will be used to test how well bermudagrass and bluegrass/fescue turfgrass species hold up to grazing. The site features four different types of permanent perimeter fencing and three different types of removable internal fencing.

project leader, Dr. Amy Burk. "Sometimes it hard to convince farm owners to change their management practices until they see it being done by someone else. We're that someone."

The first educational event of 2009 will be a free Pasture Walk on April 2nd from 5:30-7:30 pm. Pasture walks and other educational events will focus on topics including pasture establishment and management, soil testing and fertility, weed control, rotational grazing, safe fencing and gate options, and manure management.

The project was made possible through a collaboration of horse, forage, and soil conservation experts, and supported by a Conservation Innovation Grant from the Natural Re-



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