

NEWS RELEASE

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NC State Veterinary Teaching Hospital Offers Incentives for Canine Blood Donors

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Veterinary Teaching Hospital at North Carolina State University is offering dog owners incentives – free vaccinations, comprehensive health-care screenings, and lifetime blood transfusions – for their pets if the animals qualify as donors for a canine blood bank.

The incentives, which could annually save owners between \$350 and \$500 in vaccinations, health care screenings, and blood work, are provided for as long as the dog remains a donor. Blood transfusions, each of which can cost as much as \$300, are provided free for the life of the pet.

Part of the College of Veterinary Medicine, the Veterinary Teaching Hospital is making the appeal for canine blood donors in order to build up a reserve and ensure an adequate blood supply for the many sick and injured dogs that are referred to the hospital's clinics or that are admitted to the Small Animal Emergency Service.

“We are in chronic need of canine blood,” says Dr. Bernie Hansen, a board-certified critical care specialist who helps manage the hospital's Intensive Care Unit. “Our surgical patients create a demand, of course, as do those dogs referred to us because they are anemic and require transfusions.”

The demand for blood has increased significantly with the growth in the number of dogs and the related increase in owners requesting life-saving measures for their animal companions. As a tertiary care facility, the Veterinary Teaching Hospital cares for the most seriously sick and injured dogs that are referred by area veterinarians.

The hospital's staff collects and organizes blood donations and separates units into packed red blood cells and plasma. The packed blood cells, which expire in 35 days, are available for use within the hospital clinics as well by area veterinarians. The units of blood that are separated into fresh plasma are frozen and remain good for a year or more.

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To be considered, donor dogs should be of good temperament, weigh more than 50 pounds, must be between the ages of 1 and 5, have a clean health history, and should have the likelihood of remaining in the area so they can serve as donors for up to three years.

Following the initial screening, which can be done by telephone, donors will be blood typed and checked for infectious diseases such as tick-borne illnesses. Those who are evaluated as universal donors will then receive a comprehensive health care screening, which will include blood count, blood chemistry profile, a urine analysis, and a physical examination. The dog may become a donor if tests reveal a healthy pet that is not overly stressed by the experience.

“We only select dogs that are not stressed, and we make sure that they are comfortable,” says Hansen. “It’s a positive experience. They receive excellent care and the owner has the satisfaction of knowing that the pet may help save the life of another dog.”

The blood donation process, which is done every eight weeks for a maximum of three years, is painless and involves a local anesthetic. A mild sedative also can be applied if appropriate. The owner may wait while the donation takes place or can return later in the day to pick up the pet.

A 70-pound dog may donate a unit, or one pint of blood, at a time. During the course of three years, this can amount to 18 units. Last year the Veterinary Teaching Hospital required some 358 units of blood, about half of which were used during surgeries while the remaining units were used for the blood transfusions needed in the treatment of various disorders.

“We currently have 28 dogs enrolled in the program and we could use an additional 40 donors,” said Samantha Normandin, the veterinary technician who manages the canine blood bank. “Just as people donate blood to save the lives of other people, dogs can save the lives of other dogs. A single donation can potentially save four lives.”

Interested owners should call Samantha Normandin at 919/513-6030 for more information.

About the Veterinary Teaching Hospital: Established in 1983, the NC State College of Veterinary Medicine’s Veterinary Teaching Hospital provides round-the-clock veterinary medical services for veterinarians and animal owners. With more than 50 board-certified clinicians, every animal is seen and cared for by a clinical expert and patients benefit from the combined expertise of multiple specialists functioning in a team approach to health care. The foundation of the Veterinary Teaching Hospital is its partnership with referring veterinarians and a continuing commitment to the best possible care for patients. Each year nearly 17,000 patients are examined in the hospital and surveys report that 98 percent of clients rate the services as good to excellent.