

Julia H. Schuster
258 Pinewood Street
Memphis, TN 38117
901-767-5900
juliaschuster@comcast.net

The Dawning of Veterinary “Wellness Renaissance”

On May 12th, 2008, over 100 American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists (ACVO) nationwide will provide free eye exams to the service dogs that dedicate their lives to our national security and assist disabled Americans with the basic tasks most people take for granted each day (www.ACVOeyeexam.org). Using the Pet Health Systems “Pet Wellness Report,” a wellness assessment tool endorsed by the Tennessee Veterinary Medical Association, among others, that assists veterinarians in the early detection of diseases that can adversely affect pet health, and in conjunction with primary care veterinarians nationwide, ACVO veterinary specialists will provide complimentary eye exams, while Pet Health Systems donates the lifestyle assessments, biochemical profiles, and complete blood counts to service dogs to assure that these animals are in the best health possible in which to do their jobs.

Each year, thousands of pet illnesses go undetected in general wellness check-ups because animals lack the ability to communicate health issues, and because animals inherently mask health problems with their “survival of the fittest” mentalities. As disturbing and frustrating as this might be to the average pet owner, the ramifications of hidden illnesses to service dogs is compounded exponentially. Our nation can’t afford for service dogs to lose valuable time on the job due to illness; and a sick dog cannot perform to its greatest potential. Plus, the training and expense of replacing these dogs is both emotionally and financially taxing to their owners and the government departments and agencies that depend on them in so many ways. Not to mention the emotional turmoil a first responder or a disabled service dog’s owner experiences when their pet, their partner, their life companion, becomes ill.

The startling success of a similar and much smaller service dog eye exam event held in Memphis, Tennessee last December, where 87 service dogs from the Memphis area were examined, tested, and in some cases, treated for unsuspected and often life

altering medical problems that were discovered that day, precipitated the creation of the national event. Spearheading the event was Memphis veterinary ophthalmologist Dr. Bill Miller, who says, “These dogs need and deserve superlative care. While most dogs examined that fine December day left happily with no detectable abnormalities,” Miller says, “several dogs were treated, and one very special service dog named Quest, a seeing-eye dog owned by blind veteran, Ron McKenney, solidified my commitment to this cause. In May, thousands of dogs will be screened. The potential for helping and healing is staggering.”

Unfortunately and fortunately, Dr. Miller discovered an ocular tumor in Quest’s right eye, a tumor that could threaten his eyesight, his ability to serve his owner as he has done for so many years, and ultimately, his life, a tumor that would have gone undetected in a traditional medical workup. Yes, on that fine December day, Quest needed Dr. Miller’s veterinary ophthalmologic expertise; Quest needed urgent care, Quest needed the Pet Wellness Report and the physician teamwork that linked his primary care veterinarian with Dr. Miller.

Although Quest is doing better, he’s not out of the woods yet. An experimental cancer vaccine is an option as his caring veterinary team struggle to save this dog that no one realized had this debilitating disease. Ron McKenney, Quest’s owner, is so thankful for the ACVO Eye Exam Event, and for the Pet Health Systems Pet Wellness Report that helped to diagnose his dog’s problem long before it would have ever been discovered otherwise. McKenney believes, “If the ACVO Eye Exam Event can help my dog, and give him a chance at beating this disease before it gets too advanced, just think what it can do for the hundreds, if not thousands of service dogs that will be able to participate in the nationwide event. I can’t imagine living without my best friend, Quest. I depend on him for everything, but more important, I love him. I don’t want to lose him. He’s my life. I thank Dr. Bill Miller for the Eye Exam Event, Dr. Chuck Halford, my primary care vet, and Pet Health Systems for all they’ve done to help my beloved Quest.”

Now, service dogs across the country will have the opportunity of this free offering of early detection and preventive care. (See December event video here: http://www.acvo.org/diplomates/ExamDay/Eye_Exam_Day.wmv) How many will be saved? How many hidden illnesses will be diagnosed and treated, allowing the service

dogs to go on about their business of keeping our country safe? And how many will receive the gratifying assurance based on medical science that their dog is healthy and ready to continue serving with a clean bill of health? Thousands, that's how many. Thousands will be examined, and all will benefit from this unprecedented dog wellness event.

On May 12th, the ACVO National Service Dog Eye Exam Event will grant these dogs a voice, an advocate, a way to even their odds of continued good health through early detection of illnesses. Service dogs will take advantage of the "wellness renaissance" veterinary medicine is experiencing, thanks to the dedication of caring veterinary professionals whose life mission is the care and treatment of "man's best friend," and with the support of the Pet Health Systems "Pet Wellness Report," which offers scientific data and lab results which enhance the traditional "Standard of Care."

For more information about the ACVO National Service Dog Eye Exam Event, or Pet Health Systems' "Pet Wellness Report," contact:

Stacey L. Daniel, MA, Executive Director
American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists
ACVO Vision for Animals Foundation
PO Box 1311
Meridian ID 83680
Ph 208-466-7624
Fax 208-466-7693
Email: office08@acvo.org
www.ACVOeyeexam.org

James R. McPeak
Pet Health Systems, LLC
833 Creekside Drive, Suite 1
Memphis, TN 38117
901- 233-7150
jmcpeak@PetHealthSystems.com

Julia H. Schuster
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