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Kansas City symposium focuses on 'zoobiquitous' research

Speakers' presentations discuss collaboration between veterinary, human medicine.

Sep 23, 2013

By [Tad Coles, DVM](#)
DVM360 MAGAZINE

"Zoobiquitous Research" was the theme for the annual Kansas City Area Life Sciences Institute (KCALSI) Animal Health Research Symposium Aug. 26, which explored collaborative research between veterinary and human medical professionals. "The presentations are about advantages of advancing research, on both the animal side and human side, by recognizing the connection between human and animal health, and how companies and entrepreneurs have leveraged research in one to help the other," said KCALSI President and CEO Wayne O. Carter, DVM, PhD, DACVIM.

KCALSI, along with the Kansas City Animal Health Corridor and the veterinary schools of Kansas State University and the University of Missouri, presented the symposium in conjunction with CVC Kansas City. This year's theme was sparked by the successful publication of an international bestseller coauthored by UCLA cardiologist Barbara Natterson-Horowitz, MD, and science journalist Kathryn Bowers: *Zoobiquity: The Astonishing Connection Between Human and Animal Health*. The authors merged "zoo" and "ubiquity" to coin the term "zoobiquity."

Bowers, the keynote speaker, started things off with "Zoobiquity: What Jaguar Breast Cancer, Dolphin Diabetes, and Flamingo Heart Attacks Mean for Human Health." She pointed out instances where evolutionary biology (zoo), substantiated the omnipresence (ubiquity) of oneness and described how veterinary information should be investigated and used to improve human medicine and vice versa. Bowers stated that it was time to look beyond zoonoses and public health in order to achieve the maximum benefit for one health.

So what exactly is zoobiquitous research? According to Bowers, it encourages research in natural animal models with spontaneously occurring diseases and includes concurrent research in many other fields such as evolutionary and wildlife biology, comparative zoology, animal behavior, psychiatry and anthropology.

"This symposium is the perfect place to have a major conversation about animal health, human health, and the many key areas where these two fields could and should be intersecting," Bowers said. The following experts provided fodder for that conversation, much of which is of interest to private veterinary practitioners:

> **Scott Weir, PharmD, PhD**, director of the Institute for Advancing Medical Innovation, associate director for translational research at the University of Kansas Cancer Center and toxicology professor at the KU Medical Center, presented "The Application of Comparative Oncology to Human Therapeutics." Of particular interest to canine practitioners are proof-of-concept trials using spontaneous canine sarcomas that mirror human



sarcomas with evaluation of drugs for humans and dogs performed in parallel to get drugs to market.

> **Tonatiuh Melgarejo, DVM, PhD**, associate professor of human nutrition at Kansas State University, presented “Evolutionary Approach to the Discovery of Novel Immunotherapeutics.” Melgarejo researched hyenas and found extraordinary peptides that are essential to a robust immune system and protect hyenas from anthrax, rabies and other infectious diseases. Those studies and the development of a novel cationic peptide, canine cathelicidin (K9CATH), which has broad antimicrobial activity, could potentially lead to development of similar products in other species and to reduced antibiotic use in all animals—including humans.

> **Lisa Stehno-Bittel, PhD**, chair of the Department of Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation Science at KU Medical Center and founder and president of Likarda, an animal health startup, made the next presentation, “Canine and Feline Diabetes: A Cure for All.” She reviewed the history of preclinical research for human islet transplants as a method of reversing insulin-dependent diabetes and discussed ongoing research into using this technique to cure canine and feline diabetes.

> **Kristi Moore Dorsey, PhD**, vice president of research and development with Ceva, presented “Production Vaccines that go Beyond Animal Health.”

> **Robert Zolynas, DVM, MBA**, vice president of research and development with Bayer HealthCare, presented “Developing Human Pharmaceutical Products for use in Animal Health Applications—Lessons Learned from Bisoprolol.”

> **Ernst Heinen, DVM, PhD**, head of drug evaluation and development at Aratana Therapeutics (another new animal health company) presented “Human Research to Pet Therapeutics.”

> **Rebecca A. Johnson, PhD, RN, FAAN, FNAP**, president of the International Association of Human Animal Interaction Organizations, professor and director of the Research Center for Human-Animal Interaction at the University of Missouri College of Veterinary Medicine, and Millsap professor of gerontological nursing at the Sinclair School of Nursing at the University of Missouri, wound things up by exploring the human-animal relationship and ways in which people and companion animals can facilitate health in each other through their interactions.

A varied audience of 150 health professionals from across the country and around the world gathered at this year’s Animal Health Symposium to explore how zoobiquitous research can be used to find ways to improve the health of all animals, including humans.

Dr. Tad Coles provides medical writing and veterinary consulting services in Overland Park, Kansas.

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