

Critical Mass in Emergency/Critical Care

By Herb Whiteley

With the addition this fall of Dr. Mauria “Mo” O’Brien, the small animal emergency and critical care service at the University of Illinois Veterinary Teaching Hospital now has a second critical care specialist.

The first, Dr. Maureen McMichael, came to Illinois in fall 2007 to head the service. In the past year Dr. McMichael has introduced many changes to ensure excellent care for animal patients and dedicated service for referring veterinarians.

In addition to specialists Drs. McMichael and O’Brien, Dr. Tiffany McFadden staffs the service, providing back up and supervision for interns on all busy shifts. Fourteen certified veterinary technicians trained in emergency care are also on staff in the hospital’s ER and ICU, ensuring round-the-clock coverage.

For veterinarians throughout the state, this level of expertise and staffing offers two immediate benefits:

- You can contact our experts at any time to discuss a critical case.
- You can be assured that your emergency or critical patient referred to our hospital will receive state-of-the-art care—and you will be kept in the loop on that care.

“Within 24 hours of a patient’s arrival, the referring veterinarian gets faxed a copy of the transfer sheet or discharge papers,” says Dr. McMichael. “We let you know exactly what happened, whether the case was treated, transferred within our hospital, sent home, or advised to see you.”

Dr. McMichael came to Illinois last fall from Texas A&M, where she built a busy ER and ICU. Previously she had worked in private practice and completed a residency at Tufts. She is the author of *Handbook of Veterinary Emergency Protocols: Dog and Cat*, published earlier this year by Teton NewMedia. Her research interests include oxidative stress in the critical patient and probiotics.

In addition to overseeing the ER/ICU, Dr. McMichael is director of the small animal internship program and director of the small animal blood bank at the teaching hospital.

She has worked hard to expand the staffing and equipment in ER. Recent equipment and service upgrades include a point-of-care blood gas analyzer, in-room radiographs and ultrasound, an electrolyte machine, ventilator care, and a range of blood products including transfusions.

“I want Illinois practitioners to feel comfortable sending emergencies to Urbana. If you are too busy to see the case, send it here. We’re here to help you,” says Dr. McMichael.

“We focus on emergency treatment, but we’ll see any case that you don’t have time for. We’ll do just about everything—except vaccines or other routine care that can wait for you.”

Her goal is to make it easy for both referring veterinarians and their clients to come. She’s had a lighted sign installed on Lincoln Avenue at Hazelwood so clients can find their way when it’s dark out.

For the veterinarian, she has implemented the policy of fax notification within 24 hours of your patient’s arrival to assure good communication and continuity of care.

“When I ran the ER at College Station, we routinely had vets from Dallas, 180 miles away, sending cases to us. At Tufts, even though we were in a small town, the emergencies from the Boston metropolitan area came to us,” she says.

“I want the same thing here. I want Illinois veterinarians to know that sending your patients to Urbana will be the best thing for both your client and for you.”

A thriving ER is also good for our students.

With the hospital’s newest board-certified criticalist, Dr. Pamela Wilkins, the new equine section head, Dr. McMichael plans to hold combined rounds so that veterinary students on small animal and equine ER duty will learn from a diverse array of cases.

Whether you are calling with a question or referring a case, I encourage you to get to know Drs. McMichael, O’Brien, and McFadden. The emergency service number is 217/333-5300, or you can reach Dr. McMichael by email at mmcm@illinois.edu.