Researchers to examine the effects of animal-assisted therapy on pediatric oncology patients, their primary caregivers, and therapy dogs at two major children’s hospitals across the country

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Help for the more than 12,000 children diagnosed with cancer each year in the United States, in the form of an innovative, four-legged therapy, is about to be rigorously studied to determine its efficacy. Zoetis Inc., a global leader in the advancement of animal health and wellness, and American Humane Association, which since 1877 has been the nation’s leading charity dedicated to the welfare, wellness and well-being of children and animals, and to unleashing the full potential of the bond between humans and animals to the mutual benefit of both, are announcing the beginning of the pilot trial at sites in Florida and Tennessee of a groundbreaking research study on the effects of animal-assisted therapy on pediatric oncology patients and their families.

The Canines and Childhood Cancer (CCC): Examining the Effects of Therapy Dogs with Childhood Cancer Patients and their Families study is a multi-year, randomized controlled trial taking place in children’s hospital settings across the U.S. The CCC study will examine specific health effects that animal-assisted therapy may have for children with cancer and their families. A full literature review on these topic areas was published in April 2012.

“At Zoetis, we have long believed that the human-animal bond has far reaching effects. We see examples every day of the powerful connection that exists between pet owners and their companions, between returning Veterans and their waiting friends, between Veterinarians and their patients, so we knew we had to help define a more rigorous scientific foundation for this bond to be adopted in health care and therapy,” said Vanessa Mariani, Director Academic & Professional Affairs for Zoetis. “We are very encouraged that the Canines and Childhood Cancer study will be a solid step in that direction – we have already seen enthusiasm for this type of therapy in several hospitals and we hope our data will allow for more regular adoption of Animal Assisted Therapy.”

While the therapeutic benefits of animal-assisted therapy for patients with cancer have long been shared anecdotally by doctors, patients, caregivers, and animal-handlers, there has been limited hard evidence to substantiate these claims and no rigorous evaluations about how to best implement animal-assisted therapy in pediatric oncology settings. This study is unique because it will not only measure the effects of the therapy on the young patients and their families across multiple sites, but also on the therapy dogs themselves. American Humane Association researchers have hypothesized that the groups participating in animal-assisted therapy will experience less distress throughout the course of the patients’ treatment, and are employing a number of biological and psychological measures to test their assumptions. The research team has also hypothesized that therapy dogs will exhibit minimal distress over the course of the CCC study.

Two children’s hospitals are set to participate in the pilot clinical trial – St. Joseph’s Children’s Hospital in Tampa, Fla., and East Tennessee Children’s Hospital in Knoxville, Tenn. The pilot trial is scheduled to conclude in April 2013, with the full 12-18 month clinical trial set to begin later next year. American Humane Association and Zoetis are targeting up to three to five children’s hospitals to participate in the full clinical trial. We are currently seeking funding partners to join American Humane Association and Zoetis in this vital phase of the research study.

The patient population for the pilot will be children aged 3 through 11 years who are newly diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia – the most commonly-diagnosed childhood cancer – or who have been in treatment for less than 12 months.

“American Humane Association’s animal-assisted therapy teams have worked for years to bring comfort and minimize distress to those in hospitals, prisons, schools, and to military families,” said Dr. Robin Ganzert, American Humane Association’s President and CEO. “We are hopeful that the Canines and Childhood Cancer study will show how animal-assisted therapy should be regularly administered to pediatric oncology patients and their families as part of the recovery process. This study has the potential to impact tens of thousands of children suffering from this terrible disease.”

Following the pilot and full clinical trials, American Humane Association and Zoetis will disseminate the results via conferences and peer-reviewed journals, including those pertaining to veterinary medicine, pediatric oncology, and animal-assisted therapy.

The literature review for the Canines and Childhood Cancer study can be downloaded from www.CaninesAndChildhoodCancer.org.
About Zoetis

Zoetis (zō-EH-tis) is the leading animal health company, dedicated to supporting its customers and their businesses. Building on a 60-year history as the animal health business of Pfizer, Zoetis discovers, develops, manufactures and markets veterinary vaccines and medicines, with a focus on both farm and companion animals. The company generated annual revenues of $4.3 billion in 2012. It has more than 9,300 employees worldwide and a local presence in approximately 70 countries, including 29 manufacturing facilities in 11 countries. Its products serve veterinarians, livestock producers and people who raise and care for farm and companion animals in 120 countries.

About American Humane Association

American Humane Association is the country’s first national humane organization and the only one dedicated to protecting both children and animals. Since 1877, American Humane Association has been at the forefront of virtually every major advance in protecting our most vulnerable from cruelty, abuse and neglect. Today we’re also leading the way in understanding the human-animal bond and its role in therapy, medicine and society. American Humane Association reaches millions of people every day through groundbreaking research, education, training and services that span a wide network of organizations, agencies and businesses. You can help make a difference, too. Visit American Humane Association at www.americanhumane.org today.

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English