

## More Arrows in the Quiver: The Stanton Foundation Announces Major Funding for a New Clinical Research Program in Primary Care

The Stanton Foundation today announced funding for a major new clinical research program in canine medicine. The program will be advised by a distinguished panel<sup>1</sup> chaired by Dr. Steve Budsberg, DVM, MS, DACVS, Professor, College of Veterinary Medicine, UGA. The Foundation has made an initial commitment of \$5,000,000 to the program.

“While there are many excellent programs supporting research at the frontiers of veterinary medicine” said Dr. Steve Budsberg, panel chair, “This program is unique in that its grantmaking will be directed solely to research that provides primary care veterinarians with more and better diagnostic and treatment options allowing them to confidently practice along a “spectrum of care” This will allow them to profitably serve an economically diverse clientele.”



**Dr. Steve Budsberg**

What follows is a lightly edited Q&A with the Stanton Foundation’s advisory panel about how they define spectrum of care, the impact they hope to have and an overview of the research program.

### 1. What do you mean by “Spectrum of Care” (SOC)?

Spectrum of Care aims to address the growing problem of affordability of veterinary care by providing a continuum of acceptable care that considers available evidence-based medicine while remaining responsive to client expectations and financial limitations. Ideally, veterinarians should have the breadth of diagnostic and procedural skills and knowledge to provide several

evidence-based options for care that encompass a wide variety of diagnostic and treatment modalities for patients and their owners. While one goal is to better serve an economically diverse clientele, the spectrum of care is not solely defined by affordability.

### 2. Why do we need research in this area? Don’t many practitioners already have multiple ways of treating a pet when the client cannot afford the Gold Standard?

Yes and No - Veterinarians are constantly faced with making medical diagnostic and treatment decisions based on the limitations of the owner and their circumstances and

the breadth of the clinicians’ skills. For example, many primary care veterinarians, particularly those with limited experience, feel locked into only offering clients the “Gold Standard” options they learned in veterinary school. By practicing broadly across the spectrum of care, primary care clinicians can think differently. We are encouraging clinicians to have flexibility in designing diagnostic and therapeutic plans.

### 3. Is SOC just low-cost care or “access to care”?

No – Spectrum of Care is NOT promoting the concept of using the cheapest diagnostic and therapeutic plan for a given case or “anything goes” medicine. Spectrum of Care aims to promote the idea that there may be several options available to an owner. Each option may have limitations. With better evidence, veterinarians can confidently discuss those options, and the client can give truly informed consent.

Similarly, Spectrum of Care is not synonymous with “access to care,” although when incorporated successfully into veterinary training, it will help address accessibility. It includes better ways of teaching broad skills to the primary care practitioner and identifying business models that allow financially successful Spectrum of Care practices, as well as identifying diagnostics and procedures that prove themselves in clinical trials.

<sup>1</sup>Other panel members include:

Gary Block DVM, MS, DACVIM Practitioner at Ocean State Veterinary Specialists

Mike Dyer DVM, MS Practitioner at Proctorville Animal Clinic

Roger B. Fingland DVM, MS, MBA, DACVS Executive Associate Dean OSU and Stanton Professor

Lonnie J. King DVM, MS, MPA, ACVPM Chair at One Health Initiative Task Force and Dean Emeritus, OSU

**4. What are some examples of SOC research?**

Different options on how to treat parvovirus infections provide one of the best-known examples. Intensive inpatient medical therapy is generally associated with a good to excellent prognosis, but the treatment costs can be prohibitive for some pet owners. However, two studies have found survival of 75% or greater in dogs treated with outpatient protocols.<sup>2,3</sup> While these protocols may not always match the success rates of aggressive inpatient therapy, the considerable cost savings and high survival rates warrant veterinarians being familiar with these options when pet owners have limited financial means.

Another example of a condition that can be treated with evidenced-based lower-cost therapies is Addison's Disease. Addison's Disease is generally associated with an excellent prognosis after diagnosis. For many dog owners, the biggest challenge of treating their pet can be the cost of DOCP injections. This is particularly true for larger dogs where costs can exceed \$1,000/year. Recent studies found that by determining an individual dosing interval (IDI), the lifetime costs for DOCP can be decreased by over 50%.<sup>4,5</sup> In some animals, this can represent the difference between life and death. By being familiar with this less expensive approach to treating these patients, the animal's quantity and quality of life are maintained at a considerably lower cost than historically recommended treatment protocols.

**5. What do you hope the impact will be?**

We hope it will improve the health of millions of dogs and make veterinary practice more emotionally and financially rewarding for tens of thousands of primary care veterinarians.

*Now turning to the details of the grant program:*

**6. How large (or small) can a grant be?**

There are no preset limits. Every proposal will be evaluated in terms of the number of dogs likely to be helped if the trial succeeds.

**7. How many grants will be offered?**

All applications that meet the standard criteria for well-designed clinical trials, have costs proportionate to the number of dogs helped, and could be realistically and sustainably used by primary care practitioners will be funded.

**8. Are there areas which the Foundation has identified as priorities for research?**

The Foundation welcomes proposals in any canine-centric area.

**9. I have no experience with clinical trials. Can I still apply?**

Yes! The Foundation encourages applications from practitioners who have a strong idea but no experience in organizing clinical trials.

The foundation team will work with practitioners to help determine the grant's size and set up their study design if needed.

**10. How can I learn more?**

Full details on the program and applications are available on the Foundation's website, (<https://thestantonfoundation.org/canine-health/soc-clinical-research>).

**References**

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