

## **CHARMS**

*A New Program developed by Aldie Veterinary Hospital*

Aldie Veterinary Hospital is proud to introduce our new and proprietary program, "CHARMS." CHARMS stands for Comprehensive Health Assessment and Risk Management System.

CHARMS are a new approach to our currently recommended immunizations, disease testing, and diagnostic or therapeutic procedures. CHARMS, designed to be a tailored vaccine protocol and health plan for your pet. It also encourages the dialogue between our veterinarians and our clients about what our recommendations are and why, as well as provide a clear document outlining the plan for vaccines and recommended treatments.

For all current clients and patients, we will enact the CHARMS protocol during their next scheduled annual exam. For all new patients and new clients this will start at their initial visit with us. At this appointment, please come a few minutes early to fill out a risk assessment questionnaire, which will be the basis of the health plan and recommendations. The definition of "Risk": is the likelihood of contracting an infectious disease that we can vaccinate or test for in regards to your pet. There are questions about your pet's interactions with other animals, wildlife, and the environment, as well as questions about medical history and even behavior. We enter the answers to the questionnaire into the medical record. If your pet becomes ill or their risk changes we reassess, and if necessary modified the CHARMS plan.

As a facility where many animals are concentrated in a single area, we must strive to keep our location free of infectious disease. Vaccinations are designed to protect an individual from contracting a disease, as well as reduce the incidence of that disease in the general population. We use several vaccines here at Aldie Veterinary Hospital. Outlined below are our protocols if your pet is healthy enough to receive these vaccines. The risk factor for each patient will determine which vaccines and when to give or not to give.

- Rabies is a fatal neurologic viral disease. The law requires, and we give once during the puppy/kitten series, and again at one year of age. From there, dogs are boosted every 3 years; cats are boosted once a year.
- Distemper is a single injection of multiple viral diseases; there is one for cats and one for dogs. The distemper is given multiple times during the puppy/kitten series. At the minimum, there needs to be two vaccines after 10 weeks of age. It is given again at one year of age, and from there boosted every 3 years. Once they have had three adult boosters, we consider them adequately vaccinated for their remaining years and we do not require it again.

### **Specific to Dogs**

- Leptospirosis is a bacteria, which causes fatal kidney and liver disease, and is spread through the urine of infected animals. The highest probability of catching this disease occurs in the spring and fall during times of heavy water runoff. Vaccines against bacterial diseases do not last as long as for viral diseases, and are boosted every 6 months. This vaccine is new to Aldie Vet's patients and will initially require an initial vaccine followed by a booster in 2-4 weeks.
- Bordetella (also called "kennel cough") is a bacteria, which is highly contagious among dogs and causes a dry hacking cough. In order to provide maximum protection we recommended every 6 months.
- Lyme disease is also a bacteria, spread through tick bites, which causes arthritis-like symptoms, lethargy, loss of appetite, and in some cases kidney disease. We are not requiring this vaccine, but it is highly recommended as ticks are rampant in this area and we consistently see Lyme disease exposure and

infections. The initial vaccine series is two injections spaced 2-3 weeks apart, followed by a yearly booster.

- Canine Influenza Virus is a dog flu, which emerged in this area during summer of 2009. All dogs that are exposed to this virus will contract it since it is brand new to their immune systems. We are not requiring the vaccination of our patients, as 20% of patients who get the flu will not show any symptoms, however we certainly recommended as 5-8% of patients who get the flu can die of pneumonia. This vaccine will protect them from this severe complication caused by the flu virus.

- Heartworms and tick-borne diseases are tested in dogs on an annual basis on our in-house test. Heartworms spread through mosquitoes and can cause serious heart disease; the best way to manage them, a monthly dose of medication (in the form of a flavored tablet such as Heartgard, Tri-Heart, or Interceptor) designed to kill the worms while they are still small and circulating in the bloodstream. If preventatives are not given once, a month there is a chance that these baby worms will grow into adults, which are not affected by the monthly medication. Treatment of adult heartworms is a lengthy and expensive process, which is not without risk to the patient; therefore, we highly recommend staying on the monthly preventative. Tick-borne diseases are cut down to a minimum with topical medications such as Frontline, however with the amount of ticks in this area, please always go over your dog's skin looking for ticks every time after coming in from outside.

### **Specific to Cats**

- Feline Leukemia Virus and Feline AIDS are two fatal feline viruses, which spread among adult cats through bites and scratches. Kittens can also contract these diseases if their mother was infected; therefore, all stray cats are tested as soon as possible. A small percentage of kittens can turn positive for these viruses as their immune system matures, therefore we require kittens who were tested at less than 6 months of age be tested again 6 months later. Cats that remain indoors, once they have tested negative for these diseases, do not need to test again. Cats that go outdoors unsupervised and potentially interact with other cats must be tested once a year. The initial vaccine series consists of (2) two vaccines spaced 2-3 weeks apart with an annual booster. There is no vaccine for Feline AIDS. There is a risk of vaccine-associated tumors with the Feline Leukemia vaccine, but a cat is 10,000 times more likely to go out unprotected and catch the disease than they are to get a tumor from the vaccine.

- Felines are also known to contract heartworms. Infections often cause asthma-like symptoms, and can become fatal as the feline heart is not the natural host for heartworms. Revolution is a topical product, designed to prevent this infection, as well as control fleas. Frontline is also available here for flea/tick control in cats. We highly recommend prevention as diagnosis and treatment of heartworm infections in our feline patients can be difficult.

In addition to immunizations, our annual de-worming requirement reduces the incidence of intestinal parasites in the population and eliminates potential causes of diarrhea. De-worming also has the added benefit of minimizing potential infections in humans, especially children.

Using the CHARMS program, other important issues can be addressed based on your answers on the risk assessment questionnaire and the findings from the annual physical exam. Dental disease and obesity are important problems which can affect your pets overall health. We can perform dental cleanings and set up weight loss programs.

If you have any questions about any subject in this article, feel free to contact us at 703.327.0909. Again, we are pleased to present this cutting-edge approach to preventive and comprehensive health care, and we look forward to seeing you in 2010!