

Improving Rabbit Health

Rabbits are among the most common animals brought to the Companion Exotic Animal Medicine and Surgery Service at the UC Davis veterinary hospital. Their intelligence and social demeanor make them desirable companions. As prey animals in the wild, rabbits mask signs of disease much longer than other pets. When caring for an ill rabbit, it's important for veterinarians to consult with exotic specialists with experience treating rabbits.

Many common medications, especially antibiotics, can be toxic to rabbits. This means veterinarians need to know which antibiotics work most effectively, and ensure the drugs are administered in a way that causes as little stress as possible. Due to the rabbit's unique and sensitive gastrointestinal system, many oral antibiotics commonly given to other species cannot be used safely in rabbits.

Dr. Sara Gardhouse, an exotics resident at the hospital, leads a research project on the effects of long-acting crystalline-free acid antibiotics in New Zealand white rabbits. She and her colleagues collect blood samples from rabbits that have been administered this antibiotic. They then measure the antibiotic present in the blood to determine whether the doses are safe, the concentrations are correct, and how long this drug is effective.

"This research aims to improve the health of sick rabbits, decrease stress and pain from repeated handling and injections, and support the overall well-being of these animals," Gardhouse said.

This research is funded by donors to the Center for Companion Animal Health's (CCAH) Resident Grants Program. The ability to conduct research is a major asset to pursuing a residency at the veterinary hospital. As the hospital with the largest and most diverse residency program in the country, it is able to offer research opportunities not available elsewhere. Thanks to CCAH donors, 90 research projects are being funded by CCAH grants on an annual basis.

With an ever-increasing caseload, the Companion Exotic Animal Medicine and Surgery Service is expanding its facilities at the hospital. Exotics are becoming so popular as household pets that the service is adding three examination rooms. Completion of the expansion project is scheduled for November 2016. The additional space will enhance the service's capabilities for treating exotic species, ranging from birds, turtles and rabbits to snakes, lizards and fish.



Clinicians are investigating the safety and efficacy of antibiotics for rabbits.