

Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine

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New Sports and Rehabilitation Medicine program gets pets back in the game

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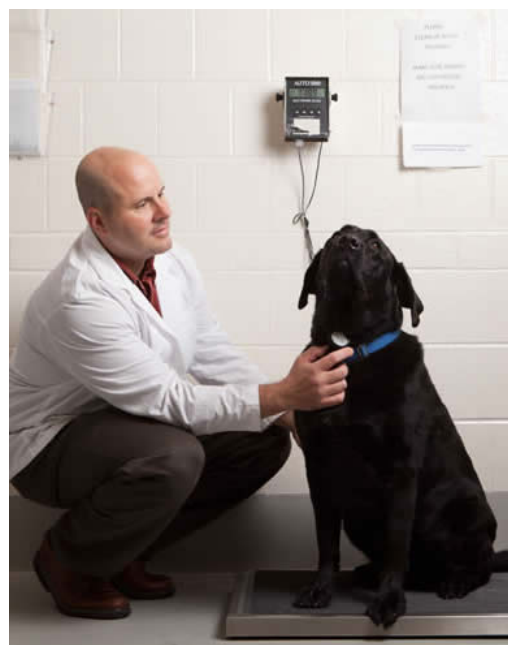
From elite champions of the sporting circuits to old dogs who enjoy casual walks, most active animals suffer setbacks at some point in their lives. Cornell University Hospital for Animals (CUHA) has initiated a new Sports and Rehabilitation Medicine service to help them return to their feet and get back in the game.

Section Chief of Clinical Nutrition Dr. Joseph Wakshlag, member of the American College of Veterinary Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation, will direct the Sports and Rehabilitation program. Specializing in rehabilitation, the service will treat canine athletes as well as other companion animals recovering from injuries or experiencing orthopedic or neurologic problems, including cats. Whether serving athletes or everyday companions, the service focuses on helping animals recover performance abilities and stay active at any age.

“Recovery is not just about surgery, physical therapy, general healthcare, or nutrition-- it’s about all these things working together,” said Wakshlag. “Just like in human medicine, sports medicine for animals is an interdisciplinary field that integrates several modalities to help patients in ways one specific service can’t. Sports medicine offers an extra level of expertise that typically can’t be found in most general veterinary practitioners’ offices.”

From classic canine athletes like racing greyhounds, sled dogs, and hunting dogs, to dogs trained in agility, jumping, and field trials, an increasing number of dogs train and compete in canine sports. While sports medicine is common in the human and equine worlds, few clinics offer such services for dogs. Since launching this spring, CUHA’s Sports and Rehabilitation Medicine program has seen around five to ten patients per week.

The program offers several treatment modalities, including shockwave ultrasound for certain orthopedic conditions, therapeutic ultrasound for deep tissue heating, transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS), underwater treadmill for rehabilitation, low level light laser therapy for wound healing and chronic pain, and electrical acupuncture. Access to a force plate, a rare piece of equipment that can objectively measure how well an animal uses a limb, can provide true validation of whether and to what extent a treatment works.





Pioneering the next generation of treatments, Wakshlag is examining tissue-healing platelet rich plasma therapy, which has revived the prowess of many amateur athletes as well as sports stars such as golf guru Tiger woods, basketball big-shot Kobe Bryant, and many racehorses. He is also involved in studies to determine whether and how supplements can enhance performance and diet can influence recovery.

“Sports medicine is getting more popular, and if we want to learn what works and how, we have to do research,” said Wakshlag. “That’s part of our duty and mission in academia, to advance the field and our understanding of it.”

Beyond research, the program opens opportunities for students to learn lesser known treatment modalities including techniques used by human physical therapists. Wakshlag will introduce basic rehabilitation lectures into the core and distribution veterinary curricula, and students serving in the orthopedics and neurology rotations may spend time with the new program’s patients.



The program also opens a new residency in Sports and Rehabilitation Medicine, which Dr. Chris Frye ’11 will complete as part of a dual residency along with Nutrition over the next five years. The new residency is funded in part by a generous gift of \$120,000 from global pet-care company Nestle Purina, which has provided a total of \$1.7 million over the past ten years to support various initiatives at the College related to improving companion animal wellbeing.

To make an appointment with the Sports and Rehabilitation Medicine program, contact CUHA at 253-3060 or vet-hosp@cornell.edu.