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Director of the Baker Institute for Animal Health and the Feline Health Center named



Dr. Colin Parrish, the John M. Olin Professor of Virology, will assume the directorship of the Cornell University College of Veterinary Medicine's Baker Institute for Animal Health and the Feline Health Center, effective December 1, 2010. Dr. Judith Appleton, the Alfred H. Caspary Professor of Immunology, stepped in as the interim director in July 2009, and led the national search for this position.

As the director, Parrish will be committed to maintaining a strong focus on research, in his own laboratory and across the Institute and Center, particularly strengthening basic research while focusing on practical outcomes that make it easier for veterinarians to provide the best medical care possible and for pet owners to be active participants in the process.

"Dr. Parrish is one of the College's most distinguished scientists," said Dr. Michael Kotlikoff, the Austin O. Hooey Dean of Veterinary Medicine, noting that Parrish has been a member of the Baker Institute faculty and the Department of Microbiology and Immunology since 1988. "I look forward to working with Colin in his efforts to continue the outstanding legacy of the Institute in discovery related to animal diseases, and to further strengthen the Feline Health Center, which provides such valuable outreach to cat owners and veterinarians. I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to Professor Judy Appleton for serving as Interim Director of the Baker Institute and Feline Health Center for the past year, in addition to her duties as Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. Judy has worked tirelessly to integrate these two exceptional College programs and identify new areas of opportunity."

Many of these opportunities lie in an enhanced research portfolio, a goal Parrish expects to pursue immediately.

"Research is at the center of a strong Baker Institute, an internationally recognized Feline Health Center, and our goals are to lead to improvements in our basic and applied medical knowledge, leading to improved health of our pets, as well as potentially improving human health," said Parrish. "To fully realize our mission, we need strong outreach programs that will share the results of our research and collaboration and effectively use our resources. I am looking forward to leveraging the best of the Baker Institute and the Feline Health Center for the benefit of all – animals and those who cherish them."

Parrish began his tenure with the Baker Institute in 1980, conducting graduate work under the guidance of Leland (Skip) Carmichael, who was also the John M. Olin Professor of Virology. He has devoted his research career to improving our

understanding of viruses: how viruses function and how viruses stay in their particular hosts and do not (usually) infect other animals. In some cases viruses gain the ability to infect and spread widely in new hosts, leading to epidemics or pandemics of new diseases. The Parrish laboratory has set its sights on understanding the underlying processes leading to the evolution of host range changes, particularly in parvoviruses.

Parvoviruses cause widespread and serious disease in humans and other animals. Prior to the 1970s, the parvovirus that we now know as canine parvovirus was found only among cats. Since 1978 it has been infecting dogs worldwide, but different forms of the viruses have appeared in various geographic regions. The Parrish team studies the canine parvovirus and feline panleukopenia virus, which are 99.5% identical in DNA sequence, and seeks to understand how subtle changes in the virus DNA enables them to jump from one species to another.

“My goal has always been to leverage basic and applied research to benefit the health and welfare of cats and dogs,” said Parrish, who currently holds multiple awards from the National Institutes of Health. “Our work will also provide a basic understanding of the processes involved, leading to insights that will also help control viral emergence in other species, including humans.”