

SEARCH:  go

CVM home > news > sir noggin

College Cornell People

## First-ever surgery on cat supported with gifts from Feline Health Center and donors around the world



Some say cats have nine lives. If so, Sir Noggin has cashed in several already. In August, he was a stray, rescued from Brooklyn traffic. At first glance, it appeared from a bump on his "noggin" that he had suffered head trauma. An MRI donated by Massachusetts Veterinary Referral Hospital in Massachusetts, however, proved otherwise: He was born with an encephalocele, a condition rarely seen because animals usually die at birth or are euthanized.

According to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, encephaloceles are "rare neural tube defects characterized by sac-like protrusions of the brain and the membranes that cover it through openings in the skull. These defects are caused by failure of the neural tube to close completely during fetal development."

In Sir Noggin's case, Dr. Curtis Dewey, associate professor and section chief for neurology at the Cornell University Hospital for Animals, explains, the sac was filled with spinal fluid that had settled between the two hemispheres of his brain and was protruding from the skull. The fluid put pressure on the cat's brain, causing him to appear depressed and lethargic after play.

Sir Noggin was referred to CUHA where Dr. Curtis Dewey, associate professor and section chief for neurology, believed the condition could be fixed. In what is thought to be the inaugural surgery to remove a feline encephalocele, Dewey removed the sac and all associated abnormal tissue, constructed a new meningeal layer using connective tissue to protect the brain, and built a new skull with titanium mesh and bone cement.

"Basically, we gave him a helmet," said Dewey, explaining that he used a special drill to insert 13, 3-millimeter screws to hold the titanium plate in place. "The surgery was a success on several levels. Of course, it was a success for Sir Noggin and his family. Beyond that, though, we have learned valuable lessons that can be applied to future cases. Encephaloceles do not have to be a death sentence for animals."

Greta Masters, who adopted Sir Noggin and has told his story on the Internet ([www.sirnoggin.com](http://www.sirnoggin.com)) has made two 10-hour road trips to Ithaca and expects to make a third trip for a follow-up visit. "He's doing marvelously," she said. "We are so pleased with all the help we received from Cornell and around the world."

The cost of the surgery was supported with a gift from the Cornell Feline Health Center as well as gifts from more than 300 donors from around the world.