



WINN FELINE FOUNDATION

For the Health and Well-being of All Cats

637 Wyckoff Ave., Suite 336, Wyckoff, NJ 07481 • www.winnfelinefoundation.org

Toll Free 888-9MEOWIN (888-963-6946) • Local Phone 201-275-0624 • Fax 877-933-0939

SCREENING SHELTER CATS FOR FELV

PROJECT STUDY: Screening shelter cats for FeLV: Balancing disease control and lifesaving

Principal Investigators: Julie Levy, DVM, PhD, DACVIM, DABVP (shelter medicine); University of Florida; Alexis Bardzinski, DVM, Austin Pets Alive!

Final report summary, W19-041

A total of 130 shelter cats with newly diagnosed natural FeLV infection were enrolled for serial monthly FeLV test panels conducted over 6 months to identify the optimal diagnostic protocol for FeLV. Each test panel included serology using whole blood, plasma, and serum, IFA, and quantitative PCR. Although some of the initial study objectives were achieved, this unprecedented level of observation unearthed new questions and challenged some long-held assumptions regarding FeLV diagnosis and outcomes of infected cats. It is unlikely that such a well-defined cohort would ever be constructed again in the future. Thus, this group of cats represents a truly unique opportunity for long-term study to answer fundamental questions about this important virus and to provide practitioners and shelter managers with the information they need to make evidence-based and cat-friendly decisions, potentially preventing the needless euthanasia of thousands of cats each year.

The original study was extended into a second phase to complete two more testing panels and to correlate survival with testing patterns. We were able to redefine diagnostic criteria for FeLV infection clinical stage, identify an abbreviated and practical test panel for staging FeLV infection, and identify cats with the best prognosis for prolonged survival. These results were used to formulate recommendations in the recently released 2020 AAFP Feline Retrovirus Testing and Management Guidelines and to develop a new FeLV diagnostic testing panel by a national laboratory. The results of this study provided immediate and actionable guidance to veterinarians, shelters, and cat owners of FeLV+ cats.

Summary prepared for Winn Feline Foundation © 2020

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