

Clinic Treats Hard-Luck Pets

Veterinary Referral hospital serves animals all over Southwest

By Allen Houston, staff writer – *Bent Tree People* – *People Newspapers*

December 17, 2004

Becca Wyatt and Jennifer Cook look younger than they are.

The 16-year-old R.L. Turner juniors are dressed in scrubs, eager to start their rounds at the Veterinary Referral Center in Bent Tree.

The two are part of a program that allows local high school students to follow the 20 specialty vets who work in the three-story building at Trinity Mills and Midway.

The clinic brings together a dermatology practice, diagnostic clinic, ophthalmology and radiology clinic, and surgery unit.

It's a long way from the days of old country vet toting around a black bag to treat the family pet. Animals come from all over the Southwest for treatment at the hospital.

Unlike a typical vet, the only way a pet comes into the clinic is if another doctor recommends it.

Dr. Joe King, administrator of the clinic, used to be a practicing vet in Carrollton before he came over to manage the referral center. He said the clinic is part of a growing trend of large clinics that cater to specialty needs.

"It used to be you wouldn't see something like this except at Vet school or a few large clinics, he said.

In the surgery unit, half a dozen procedures were going on at once the day of the girls' visit.

Becca Wyatt watched as a vet performed surgery on an animal with a fractured leg.

"It's fascinating, watching the vets save animals' lives by repairing their bones and organs," Becca said.

The most interesting procedure that the two girls watched was a shoulder repair done by inserting a camera into the dog's shoulder.

Spending time at the Veterinary Referral Center has made them want to continue their studies into veterinary school in college.

Jennifer said it was her love of animals that made her want to become a vet.

"I never get tired of spending time with them," she said.

Dr. Julie Ducote, a neurologist, and Dr. Antonio Bowens stood in front of an X-ray board and examined the skeleton of a small dog that was suffering from a herniated disc.

"We see patients with all kinds of problems, from epilepsy to spinal cord injuries," Dr. Ducote said.

Dr. King goes on his rounds, passing through the diagnostic clinic where animals can receive chemotherapy for cancer, and downstairs into the dermatology unit, where they are treated for excessive itching, ear infections, and hair loss. He stops in the radiology clinic where radiologists take radiographs or x-rays to make difficult diagnoses and perform ultrasound examinations.

"Pets are a part of the family, and people will do just about anything that they can for them," Dr. King said.

Dr. Ron Green sits in a darkened room going over data for a patient. Just that morning, he had received an e-mail from a vet in South Bend, Ind., asking him to examine the files of a patient. He also just received e-mails from a doctor in Oklahoma City and one in Martha's Vineyard.

"The digital age has broken down a lot of barriers and made it easier for clinics to hook up," Dr. Green said.

The girls said that they have learned a lot from their experiences.

"I know that I'd rather work with animals than people because they complain less," Becca said.

"It'll be a lot of hard work, but it's made me want to become a surgeon," Jennifer said.