

**New Approaches and Protocols for Heartworm Disease Presented  
at 17<sup>th</sup> Triennial Heartworm Symposium**  
*American Heartworm Society also announces new officers, board members*

**NEW ORLEANS** — From exploring novel ways to prevent heartworm disease to finding strategies to facilitate earlier heartworm diagnosis to discussing the challenge of treating heartworm-positive pets in animal shelter and community health settings, the American Heartworm Society (AHS) 17<sup>th</sup> Triennial Heartworm Symposium covered a gamut of heartworm research and clinical topics. Meanwhile, the AHS membership elected a new slate of board members and the organization's first female—and youngest—president.

**Research focused on new preventive, diagnostic and treatment protocols**

The symposium, which took place September 8-11, 2022, featured 40 speakers from three continents and was attended by veterinary practitioners, researchers, and industry representatives from a dozen countries and 30 different states. Highlights included the following:

- New animal models have been developed that will allow researchers to investigate future heartworm preventives and treatments without the need for laboratory dogs.
- By applying learnings from malaria management, researchers say treating mosquitoes—as opposed to pets—for heartworm may be a possibility in the future.
- A call to action to develop more accurate diagnostic protocols for feline heartworm disease and a better understanding of the disease's prevalence in cats was highlighted.
- A new decision tree, developed by the Association of Shelter Veterinarians in conjunction with the AHS, provided an evidence-based approach to heartworm prevention and treatment that also takes into consideration the resource limitations of many shelter organizations.

“Heartworm disease continues to be one of the most common and costly diseases confronting the veterinary profession,” said veterinary cardiologist and triennial symposium co-chair Dr. Marisa Ames, who serves as an Associate Professor of Medicine and Epidemiology at the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine. “The fact that heartworm incidence remains far too high—year after year—makes it clear that veterinarians need forward-thinking innovations and practical approaches to this disease.”

**New board members, officers elected**

During the triennial business meeting held during the symposium, 2019-2022 AHS president Dr. Chris Duke of Ocean Springs, Mississippi, turned over leadership of the AHS board to new president Dr. Jennifer Rizzo. A 2012 graduate of Kansas State University's School of Veterinary Medicine, Dr. Rizzo practices emergency medicine at Blue Pearl Pet Hospital in heartworm hotspot Gainesville, Florida. She also is the

founder of the Lone Star Veterinary Academy, which provides introvert-friendly, boutique weekend courses for veterinary professionals.

“While more than 60 percent of veterinarians identify as female, only a minority of leadership roles in veterinary organizations are held by women. I am proud to play a part in changing that statistic and hope to use my term as president to encourage and empower other young and underrepresented members of our profession to pursue leadership roles,” said Dr. Rizzo.

Since joining the AHS board in 2016, Dr. Rizzo has spearheaded efforts to involve veterinary students in the organization. The program now has 53 student liaisons at 25 veterinary schools in the U.S. and seven other countries, as well as 1,360 active student members of the organization.

In addition to electing a new president, the AHS members attending the triennial symposium also approved a slate of officers that include past president Dr. Chris Duke, vice president Dr. Chris Adolph from Tulsa, Oklahoma; secretary-treasurer Dr. Angele Bice of Summerville, South Carolina; research chair Dr. Tom Nelson of Anniston, Alabama; editor Dr. Lindsay Starkey of Auburn University; and symposium co-chairs Drs. Ames and Dr. Andy Moorhead of the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia.

In addition, honorary AHS members for 2020, 2021 and 2022 were honored at the meeting. These included retired Auburn University Professor Dr. Ray Dillon, Elevate DVM President and past AHS Executive Director Dr. Kathy Gloyd, and McGill University Professor Dr. Timothy Geary.

### **Other changes to the AHS board**

Four newly elected members were added to the board of directors at the meeting: Dr. Blue Brawner, a veterinary practitioner from Auburn, Alabama; Dr. Marc Cousins, a feline practitioner from New Orleans; Dr. Uri Donnett, Chief Veterinarian at the Dane County Humane Society in Madison, Wisconsin; Dr. Aliya Magee, the Cardiology Section Chief and Assistant Professor of Veterinary Cardiology at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge; and Dr. Lisa Young of Indianapolis, Indiana. In addition, Dr. Melissa Bourgeois of Atlanta and Dr. Lisa Young of Greenfield, Indiana, joined the board as ex-officio members.

Members rotating off the board included Dr. Brian DiGangi of Gainesville, Florida; Dr. Chris Rehm of Mobile, Alabama; Dr. Christine Royal of Madison, New Jersey, and Dr. Bianca Zaffarano of Minneapolis, Minnesota.

“I believe all of us came away from this meeting with a renewed enthusiasm to do our part to combat heartworms,” stated Dr. Rizzo. “Researchers will continue their efforts to develop more sensitive tests, optimized preventives, and faster, safer treatments. Meanwhile, shelters now have a new decision tree to guide treatment choices. The AHS will continue to build on public and professional outreach—with new resources coming

soon—and will review and update our guidelines to incorporate the latest advances. We will have much to share in the coming months.”

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**About the American Heartworm Society**

The mission of the American Heartworm Society is to lead the veterinary profession and the public in the understanding of heartworm disease. Founded during the Heartworm Symposium of 1974. The American Heartworm Society aims to further scientific progress in the study of heartworm disease, inform the membership of new developments and encourage and help promote effective procedures for the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of heartworm disease.