

**PRESS RELEASE**

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**The Bella Moss Foundation Helps pet people in the UK and US**

More and more people are seeking help and advice on their companion animals from The Bella Moss Foundation. Jill Moss, Foundation President, says, "Over the past 18 months we have had calls from people whose animals have MRSA or who have it themselves and are concerned for their pets. I have been able to put some of these in touch with the veterinary experts we have made contact with and sometimes that has been all that was needed. Sometime, though, we have had to help people understand the meaning of the information they have been given, or even go with them as support through a difficult meeting. At time it has not been easy, but the help The Foundation has managed to give has made it all worthwhile."

MRSA is not usually associated with companion animals, and a great deal of The Foundation's input has been to help people deal with the shock of realising that it has caused a death or serious illness. "Many people believe that, because MRSA is usually associated with humans, it should affect animals at all. When it does, it causes tremendous feelings of guilt and anger because we believe we should be able to protect our companion animals from infections like this. My own experience of losing my beloved companion Bella to MRSA is, unfortunately, not unique, and every pet owner who last lost their animal to MRSA has felt much as I have."

"People feel isolated and stigmatised when a pet contracts MRSA," says Jill. "They are often told that that they are the source of their pet's infection but without any clear indication of how that could be possible. The turmoil of seeing a pet go through a horrendous experience ending perhaps in death or serious disability can be compounded by the fact that those we entrust with the health of our pets don't themselves have any clear idea of what they are dealing with and yet who also have no reluctance in placing blame on owners."

Jill says that The Foundation encourages pet owners to develop good working relationships with their vets and make sure that the lines of communication are kept open. "The decisions we make are only as good as the advice that is given and the care that can be provided, and until we have clear mandatory standards introduced into veterinary practices, care for our companion animals will always be a lottery. For that reason we support the principle behind the Royal College's practice Standards Scheme, but want to see it expanded and made compulsory."

The UK is not the only country to have problems with MRSA, and The Foundation has appointed an official Representative to carry the work to the United States.

"The approach seems to be quite different in the US," says Jill. "The people who have contact us say there is much less awareness of MRSA in companion animals and much less willingness to address issues such as routine swabbing and infection control. There also appears to be much more difficulty

in accessing expert information over there. We have been able to put US vets in touch with UK experts and it has been something of an eye-opener for them.

Kim Bloomer, The Foundation's US Representative, has already been busy publicising The Foundation's work and organised an on-line conference where people could seek answers to the questions they had and which was attended by a senior DEFRA official.

"The Bella Moss Foundation has already made an important difference to the lives of pets here in the US," said Kim, "but there is still a great deal to do."

Jill says that The Foundation has been asked for help on lots of issues. "We get enquiries from people who have MRSA and who's pets are going to have surgery. They need to know how to deal with post-operative care issues and handle the risks of cross-contamination. We get owners who are colonised with MRSA wanting to know about the cycle of re-infection, particularly if their pet is also colonised. We also get a great many questions on the various treatments available and which ones are best for dealing with MRSA. Of course, providing people with this information is a full-time job in itself. Offering practical help and advice to owners and vets is something we have had to work very hard to achieve. It's wonderful to hear that due to early swabbing and good communication recovery rates are high. It's a sad fact, though, that some owners only find us when it's already too late."

Jill says, "When Bella died of MRSA in August 2004 I searched extensively for information and found nothing. Now, at least, people concerned with their pet's health can find us immediately and this is the legacy Bella leaves behind for other animals. Bella's death has not been in vain."

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