

Veterinary Team Cures Dog Blindness Disease

Experimental treatment helped cure sudden blindness in two dogs.

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An Iowa State University veterinary research team says they have found a cure for a previously permanent disease that causes sudden blindness in dogs.

Since mid-April, two dogs have been successfully treated for sudden acquired retinal degeneration syndrome, or SARDS, according to a research team led by ISU veterinary ophthalmologist Sinisa Grozdanic of the university's College of Veterinary Medicine.

The experimental treatment is believed to be the first to reverse blindness and restore sight to dogs diagnosed with SARDS. The treatment restored sight to the two dogs that were treated on April 12 and April 27, 2007.

The dogs were treated with intravenous immunoglobulin (IVIg), a human blood product that contains antibodies from the plasma of thousands of blood donors. It is used to treat immune deficiencies, inflammatory diseases, and autoimmune diseases.

"This is the first small sign of hope that actually something can be done. Although the dogs won't be catching any Frisbees, they can navigate and not bump into objects," Grozdanic said.

"At this point, the biggest unknown is how long the treatment will last. It could be anywhere from a few weeks to a few years," Grozdanic said.

SARDS, which was first identified in the 1980s, causes a sudden loss of vision despite no structural changes to the eyes or damage to the retinas in the early stages of the disease. Dogs' eyes appear completely normal, but their retinas show no electrical activity.

The disease blinds an estimated 4,000 dogs each year in North America.