



VETERINARY COMMUNITY SERVICE MADE EASY

BY CHRIS ARMSTRONG, DVM

Sometimes, failure in one area leads to great success in another. Such was the case with Pacific Assistance Dog drop-out Caber. Caber is a six-year-old Labrador who enjoys the title of the first **Trauma K9** in Canada, and is also the first Courthouse Dog. Delta Police Victim Services program coordinator Kim Gramlich was aware of a similar program that used trained trauma dogs in the United States. She explored the possibility of the Delta Police gaining such a dog, and in 2010, both Kim and Caber had new jobs. Caber has been working with the Delta Police victim services department with Kim as his handler since he was two.

TRAUMA K9

For those who are not familiar with the work of trauma dogs, the team helps victims of domestic violence, adult and child sexual assault, homicide or sudden death, and suicide; as well as individuals affected by other crimes. Caber's handler reports that he has helped her clients in a myriad of ways. Caber reduces their blood pressure, calms them down quickly, provides a conduit for effective communication, helps people who struggle to talk, and provides a source for cathartic touch. His handler says nothing breaks down barriers better than the presence of Caber.

Check out a great video about Caber at: <http://youtu.be/JDHRqNIF-BU>.

Canada's three other Victim Services Trauma K9s are in Alberta: one with Calgary Police Service, one with Camrose Police Service, and one with Bonnyville RCMP. Other police agencies are actively investigating the idea with a view to starting their own Trauma K9 programs, but they are in the development stage at this point.

OPPOSITE PAGE

Caber, ready to work: **RIGHT** Colour-coded first aid kit.



As veterinarians, we are privileged to care for many special patients and assist our communities by varied methods. One special group of patients that I have come to know very well are the police service dogs (PSDs) and their handlers from the Delta and New Westminster police departments. Not surprisingly, this elite squad is composed primarily of athletic German Shepherds.

My involvement originally began over 20 years ago, with the medical treatment of a few police dogs. As a relationship of trust developed, our hospital became the first-line veterinarians for the entire contingent of Delta and New Westminster PSDs. The ability to treat a group of patients whose "owners" require only the best care possible is at times both exciting and demanding. As we know, trauma patients and emergencies don't tend to book appointments, but thankfully I have never had a complaint when a police dog is seen ahead of a regularly scheduled appointment.

A number of other ancillary veterinary services began to emerge. One area of involvement I have enjoyed is assisting in the final selection of a few of the more recently selected PSD members. Each PSD member is very carefully selected for health, temperament, and drive and, as you would expect, it is of paramount importance to have a working dog with the correct temperament and drive.

I am also involved in the continued training of the handlers in the care of their dogs. In collaboration with the head of the dog squad, we developed a practical first aid kit with a colour-coded set of instructions that the handlers carry. We bring the officers into our hospital for basic first aid training and a session on the use of their kit. Our hospital has each first aid kit on a recall list to return it for inspection and replacement of any required items. This allows our technicians to clean, reorganize, and restock these kits. This service provided by our hospital is greatly appreciated by the handlers and their departments. Thinking outside the box with respect to the scope of a traditional small animal practice has its rewards.

Caber, with his laid-back personality and lack of drive but not intelligence, often crosses my mind when I hear of a tragic event in our community. Although I may not see him as regularly as some of the other PSDs, who are more prone to personal athletic and work-related traumatic accidents, he is a beloved patient at my clinic. It is always a pleasure to see him and assist in maintaining his continued mental and physical well-being. 🐾

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