



October 18, 2004

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**CENTRAL FLORIDA VETERINARY SPECIALTY HOSPITAL LAUNCHES PHYSICAL THERAPY PROGRAM,
IMPROVES QUALITY OF LIFE FOR LOCAL DOGS**

MAITLAND, Fla. – If you experience an injury or undergo joint replacement surgery, you would probably receive extensive physical therapy to restore your mobility and speed your recovery. Through Affiliated Veterinary Specialists' (AVS) new physical therapy program, your dog can now receive the same beneficial treatments and advanced medical care.

The physical therapy program focuses on alleviating pain and restoring a dog back to its highest possible level of function and activities after an injury, surgery or other medical problem. Along with massage, stretching, and a variety of exercises and heat/ice therapy, the new program features aquatherapy using a Ferno Underwater Treadmill. This technology, originally developed for horses, allows a dog to walk on a treadmill that is submerged in a chlorinated, warm-water, 400-gallon tank. The tank's water level is adjusted depending on the size of the dog and the focus of the treatment. By increasing the water level, the therapist can reduce the amount of body weight the dog must carry as it walks on the treadmill. As the dog gains strength, it can walk in a shallower depth, against a current, or at a faster speed. The water can also be raised high enough so that the dog can swim. Whether walking or swimming, the dog benefits from the added buoyancy and resistance the warm water provides.

"We are doing things now that we could only dream of when I was training 15 years ago," commented AVS Medical Director and Orthopedic Surgeon Jacek J. de Haan, D.V.M. "This program in general and the aquatherapy component in particular, allow dogs to recover quicker and at a much higher level than we were able to achieve before."

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Bella, a five-year-old Yorkshire Terrier, suffered from a dislocated knee cap and couldn't walk for a year and a half. After undergoing corrective knee surgery at AVS, she began the new physical therapy program. "Before she began therapy two months ago, I thought she would be crippled for the rest of her life, and now she is walking on all four legs," said Bella's owner Vi Mary Finch. "It is just amazing!"

Specific conditions that benefit from treatment include arthritis, tendonitis, hip/elbow dysplasia, knee/shoulder problems, disc herniation, spinal injuries, paralysis and obesity. Physical therapy often results in a quicker recovery time, decreased swelling, increased flexibility and range of motion, reduced pain and inflammation, reduced muscle atrophy and increased muscle mass and strength. Sessions range from 30-45 minutes, and the cost is \$49 per session or \$79 for two sessions in the same day. AVS veterinarians and specially trained physical therapy staff work closely together to evaluate each pet and determine the specific treatment plan and number of visits required for optimal recovery.

The physical therapy program can also enhance performance conditioning and recovery for canine athletes. Kyra, an active, three-year-old Australian Shepherd, is an award-winning agility dog who has even made a guest appearance on David Letterman's "Stupid Pet Tricks." She had knee surgery earlier this year to correct a genetic problem and in July, began a comprehensive physical therapy regimen at AVS, including aquatherapy, to speed her recovery and get her back on the agility circuit. "Kyra loves to run and would never be content just staying home," explained her owner Niki Muth. "Since she began the therapy, she is doing fantastic. She absolutely loves going and doesn't want to leave when I pick her up."

Nestled in the trees along 17-92 in Maitland, AVS is the only veterinary specialty hospital of its kind in Central Florida. Established in 1992, it offers access to highly-trained veterinarian specialists in soft tissue and orthopedic surgery, internal medicine, neurology and neurosurgery, and radiology, serving more than 5,000 new patients each year. AVS works closely with general practice veterinarians throughout Central Florida, and all clients must be referred by their family veterinarian. For more information, call 407-644-1287.

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