



FCoV-23 INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH CONSORTIUM (IRC)

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Position Statement: Advancing Therapeutic Options for Feline Infectious Peritonitis

(2024)

Feline infectious peritonitis (FIP) has long been a devastating and almost always fatal disease in cats. Recent advancements are now showing strong treatment efficacy with new antiviral drug candidates. Many of these drug candidates have shown utility in the treatment of COVID-19 in humans, opening the door to off-label veterinary use in FIP in some parts of the world with tremendous success. Here we outline the key issues currently faced and our call to action for the development and utilization of diverse, globally accessible, cost-effective therapeutic drugs.

Current Treatment Outcomes

- While preliminary studies have shown encouraging remission rates of 77-100%,¹⁻¹¹ many cats still require many weeks of treatment, an alternative antiviral, or a combination of antiviral therapies to achieve sustained remission. Providing combination treatment involving several drugs should also reduce the risk of drug resistance development as shown in humans with human immunodeficiency virus infection. Thus, continued development of these therapies is absolutely essential to further improve long term outcomes.

Existing Barriers

Funding for Research

- Investment in research for multiple anti-coronavirus agents, including combination antiviral therapy is crucial. The rapid evolutionary potential of coronaviruses, as seen with FCoV-23, poses a significant threat to feline populations globally. This includes evolutionally fragile endangered species. Financing continuous research is essential to ensure we understand the implications of viral evolution on antiviral efficacy.



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Sustained Global Access to Treatment

- There are currently no registered veterinary products available.
- There are significant disparities in access to off-label use of effective antiviral drugs between countries and many regions of the world remain without legal access to any effective treatment.
- As the demand for antiviral drugs from the COVID-19 pandemic diminishes, we are now seeing countries lose access to previously available drugs.
- The absence of an effective vaccine for FIP significantly impairs prevention strategies, further highlighting the critical need for sustained global access to affordable and diverse treatment options.

Welfare Impacts

- The lack of access to effective and financially viable treatments has severe welfare implications. FIP is a fatal disease. Without access to effective treatment, affected cats continue to face inevitable suffering or humane euthanasia as their only options. The negative welfare impacts on these cats and their loving caregivers are severe.
- Due to a lack of registered veterinary therapeutics and a lack of off-label access to human registered antivirals in many countries, there has been the emergence of a robust unlicensed drug market. Many owners elect to source these unlicensed antivirals illegally to treat their cats at home, seeking treatment advice from social media groups. Ongoing dependence on unlicensed antivirals seriously damages the caregiver – veterinarian relationship and as a result, many cats worldwide do not receive essential veterinary care to optimise treatment and welfare outcomes.

Economic Burden

- The cost of treatment for FIP remains prohibitive for many caregivers, even where legal off-label access is available, with many still forced to humanely euthanize their cats purely due to economic constraints. In countries like Cyprus, the epicentre of the FCoV-23 outbreak, most cats are strays or live in shelters with limited funding. Efforts to control this outbreak have been hampered by a lack of affordable therapeutic options, leading to thousands of cats dying or being euthanized. Is it fair that only cats of the wealthy should be saved?

Flexible Treatment Formulations

- Varying formulations are needed to improve treatment outcomes, particularly access to intravenous options for stabilizing critically ill cats and oral options for ongoing treatment.



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Duration of Therapy

- Reducing the duration of treatment is vital, and ongoing research is the only avenue by which these approaches can be proven effective. Prolonged therapy increases stress on both the cat and the caregiver, increases risk of side effects, is not sustainable for the stray and shelter population, heightens the risk of antiviral resistance, and may have broader “one-health” implications for other coronaviruses, including those in humans, due to the broad-spectrum nature of these drugs.

Call to Action

We urge for increased funding and support for research into a variety of antiviral drug candidates, including combination therapies. The recent emergence of the highly virulent FCoV-23 highlights the urgent need to advance research in this arena such as multi-modal therapeutic interventions. Our goals are to:

Ensure global accessibility

- Make effective treatments available and affordable worldwide.

Improve treatment protocols

- Develop shorter, more effective, and flexible treatment regimens.

Enhance understanding

- Commit to ongoing research to anticipate needs in the face of viral evolution and emergence of antiviral resistance.

Legal implication

- Amend legislative frameworks to allow faster legalization of potential antiviral drugs to all countries, as well as reviewing the use of the cascade when using these drugs.



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