

President's Message by Jane Hamilton-Merritt

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Llamas at the Forefront of Alzheimer's Research. A "Walk to End Alzheimer's" should be led by a llama.

In 2011, I wrote an article for our Newsletter entitled, "A Llama Could Save Your Life" describing the medical break-through by Ablynx, a Belgium based biopharmaceutical company, which patented llama antibodies as "nanobodies." The immune system of the llama is unique in the mammal world in that in addition to ordinary antibodies, it is the only mammal with extremely small antibodies. Conventional antibodies are very large compared to those of llamas—about 90% larger. With this discovery researchers thought that the much smaller nanobodies could be used to deliver medicines into areas unreachable by the larger ones. Maybe - it was thought - the smaller ones could maneuver into tumor masses, travel into arthritic appendages to block the proteins that cause inflammation, or find their way through the blood in the brain to block plaque build-up.

Since the discovery of nanobodies in 1992, much research has taken place. One of the most interesting results is how nanobodies might help in identifying the on-set of Alzheimer's, one of today's most perplexing and troubling diseases. Many of us have family or friends who suffer from this disease. Now it seems that our incredible llamas are playing a key role in addressing this nightmare.

"Llama Antibodies May Work to Visualize Brain Changes in Alzheimer's Patients," reads the headline in a 2016 *Alzheimer's News Today* article which reports that llama "nanobodies" might be able to assist physicians in identifying those who need treatment. Nanobodies with florescent dyes apparently can penetrate the wall of cells guarding the brain so MRIs can detect if there is amyloid-beta plaque in the brain and treatment is needed.

Barb Baker, GALA Board Member, suggested that a "Walk to End Alzheimer's" should be lead by a llama. I heartily agree. Why not inform your local Alzheimer's chapter about the nanobody-llama connection and then perhaps suggest that a llama be invited to lead the walk. This would not only provide a platform for the importance of llamas in this unique medical research but would bring additional attention for the need to find treatment for Alzheimer's.

While llama nanobodies help save human lives, GALA works to save llama lives. GALA has approved a six month no cost extension to Tufts University's Dr. Daniela Bedenice's research on Meningeal Worm. The reason for the request: "...in order to pursue further drug (Eprinomectin) challenge of infective *P. tenuis* larvae we had to establish a larger colony of snails (that serve as the host for *P. tenuis*). It has taken approximately 7 months to breed sufficient numbers of snails to infect with *P. tenuis*. The goal of a 6 months extension is to present our data at the upcoming GALA meeting (Nov. '17) and analyze results for future publication."

GALA granted \$1,500 to help fund field activities for students who traveled to Peru to work with Dr. Stephen Purdy's llama project. The research team included: Dr. Purdy, a Peruvian vet, three US vet

students from Kansas State, Purdue, and Georgia, a vet student from Peru, and three pre-vet students from a Massachusetts school.

Massachusetts Senate Bill 490, which classified llamas as “wild and exotic” animals, was returned to Committee after a public hearing made clear that llamas have been domesticated for thousands of years and are not “wild and exotic” animals. GALA will continue to monitor this legislation.

Added to the Llama Promotion Committee is a Fiber Promotion Sub-Committee, which will be responsible for promoting the many uses of llama fiber and its value to our industry and beyond. This is an exciting and important addition to GALA.

Remember to order copies of our new Llama Promotion Brochure (which has been receiving “rave reviews”) from Carol Millard at cmillard@usj.edu. The GALA Board has approved \$150 to cover the cost of mailing the brochures to members who request them.

This November GALA will celebrate its 30th Anniversary!! Plan to be part of this major celebration. Many of you have worked diligently over the years serving on various GALA Committees, on the Board, Chairing Conferences, sponsoring the Conferences, and, most important, ATTENDING and PARTICIPATING in the sessions. All of this makes a GALA Conference a most unique, memorable and educational event.

I am looking forward to seeing all of you who have made GALA a great organization and to meet the newer Members of our camelid community who, I’m certain, will carry on the work of GALA. GALA’s mission may change to meet the community’s evolving interests, but the spirit that created this unique organization will endure.

Jane Hamilton-Merritt
GALA President