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NATIONAL AQUARIUM IN BALTIMORE PROVIDES DOLPHIN INNOVATIVE MEDICAL TREATMENT

Care Includes Use of Dolphin Nebulizer; Collaboration with Hopkins, Walt Disney World Resort

Baltimore, November 3, 2004 — In a collaborative effort with medical imaging experts at Johns Hopkins Hospital and marine mammal experts from The Living Seas at Epcot at Walt Disney World Resort, the National Aquarium in Baltimore's veterinary and marine mammal staffs are treating an Atlantic bottlenose dolphin with a serious respiratory condition.

Bob, a male dolphin estimated to be in his mid-twenties, has received individualized, comprehensive care since trainers noticed behavioral changes in early September. At that time, a thorough physical showed elevated white blood cell counts and liver enzymes, and Bob began receiving antibiotics. By late October, Bob's condition had worsened and a respiratory infection was evident. Based upon clinical findings, antibiotics were changed. The veterinary and marine mammal staff also designed a nebulizer, similar to those used by people with asthma, and use it to administer medications as an aerosol several times daily. Staff are monitoring and working with Bob 24 hours a day. He receives a special diet to prevent dehydration.

"We are giving Bob the best treatment available; however, he's in critical condition and his prognosis is guarded," said Brent Whitaker, DVM, the Aquarium's director of animal health. "We know that he has a serious lung infection and are trying to determine if this infection extends to other areas of his body. We are doing everything we can to improve his condition."

Bob's care is a collaborative effort with other nationally known health experts. The Living Seas at Epcot at Walt Disney World Resort, which loaned Bob to the National Aquarium for breeding purposes, has had members of its training and medical departments at the Aquarium for the past ten days. Johns Hopkins experts have weighed in with medical imaging techniques to detect underlying illness. But because of his size – approximately 500 pounds – Bob is too large to undergo a CT scan.

“Thanks to the close relationships we have with the dolphins we noticed changes in Bob's behavior early, provided hands-on treatment, and tested the other dolphins,” said Sue Hunter, director of marine mammals and animal programs for the Aquarium. “My team and dedicated volunteers have monitored Bob around the clock for the past ten days and we're all committed to doing whatever it takes to care for him.”

If Bob responds to the latest round of antibiotics, it may be two to three weeks before improvements are seen. As a continued precaution, he has been separated from the other dolphins.

The National Aquarium in Baltimore, a non-profit organization, is Maryland's most exciting and popular cultural attraction, as well as one of the region's leading conservation and education resources, hosting more than 1.6 million visitors per year. The Aquarium's mission is to connect people with aquatic life in order to create a better world for both. It is dedicated to education and conservation through more than a dozen programs that serve the environment and the community.

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