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Family Business

By Kristin Loving, Veterinary Health Center



It was the family atmosphere and values that brought veterinarian Kate KuKanich to the Veterinary Health Center at Kansas State University and it was family that she found. Literally. She came to the university as Dr. Stenske, but it wasn't long before she met her future husband, veterinarian Butch KuKanich. The two married in 2010; have a son, Jack, born in 2012, and are expecting their second child in April.

Kate KuKanich, assistant professor of small animal internal medicine, knew early on that she wanted to be a veterinarian. It was not always internal medicine that had her attention, though. Zoo medicine was her focus and she spent several years working with zoos across the country. As she worked her way through fourth-year rotations at the University of Minnesota College of Veterinary Medicine, she decided small animal internal medicine would be her specialty of choice.

"I knew I wanted to be in academia. Those of us who come to teach have a desire to help advance the career of others," she said. She also spends a significant amount of time researching bacteria that can be spread between humans and animals in hopes of minimizing illness for people and pets.

Butch KuKanich, associate professor of anatomy and physiology, studied wildlife biology and received his D.V.M. at Virginia Tech. He worked in private practice for four years before attending North Carolina State University to study pharmacology. His research focus is pain management.

"More and more dogs are having chronic pain due to conditions such as osteoarthritis and cancer, and it is important to keep them comfortable and maintain a good quality of life for them," he said.

He is a diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Clinical Pharmacology, and she is a diplomate of the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine. This unique combination positions them well to apply for grants. They received a grant to study the effects of certain pain medications in dogs.

"Unfortunately, there are not very many choices for drug therapies to treat pain in dogs as outpatients. Tramadol is frequently used, but its efficacy is very low. The goal of the research is to enhance the analgesic effects of tramadol in dogs by enhancing oral absorption," Butch KuKanich said. They are currently collaborating on several projects investigating drug interactions between gastroprotectant and antibiotic therapy in dogs.

Kate KuKanich's research interests include bacterial sharing between companion animals and their owners; the epidemiology of antimicrobial resistance; and hospital-acquired infections. Her work is supported by grants from the Morris Animal Foundation and the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine Foundation. Her clinical interests are infectious disease, respiratory and gastrointestinal diseases, and managing complicated urinary tract infections. She is also interested in zoonotic diseases and public health.

Butch KuKanich's research interests are in the evaluation and design of rational drug dosages through the use of pharmacokinetic, pharmacodynamics and pharmacokinetic-pharmacodynamic studies. His research is supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture; the Morris Animal Foundation; the Veterinary Pharmacology Research Foundation; and the Kansas Racing and Gaming Commission.