"Animal Hyperbaric Therapy"

The use of hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBOT) in animals has significantly increased in the last five to ten years. An associated escalation in manufacture and purchase of hyperbaric chambers has accompanied the use of this treatment modality in large and small animals. In the right hands, the application of HBOT for animals is a safe, effective and non- invasive treatment modality that is proving highly effective. Hundreds of thousands of animals have been successfully treated in hyperbaric chambers across the globe. In the interest of preserving the efficacy of HBOT in animals and eliminating, to the greatest extent possible, the potential for accidents or other adverse incidents associated with this valuable therapy, the Veterinary Hyperbaric Medicine Society (VHMS) puts forth the following statements regarding the proposed standard of practice in animal hyperbaric medicine.

A hyperbaric chamber is classified as a specialized medical device and oxygen is considered a drug by the FDA. As such, the use of hyperbaric oxygen and the operation of hyperbaric chambers requires specialized training.

It is the responsibility of the individual hyperbaric facility and program to ensure that personnel associated with the medical and operational aspects of hyperbaric therapy are properly prepared through industry approved training programs. It is highly recommended that a basic hyperbaric training course be completed by all hyperbaric personnel. In addition, at least one person should have completed a hyperbaric safety course and be certified as a Hyperbaric Veterinary Technologist (CHT-V).

For the safety of our animal patients and the efficacious use of hyperbaric oxygen therapy in animals it is mandatory that individuals prescribing and treating animals in the hyperbaric environment have experience in animal behavior and management.

Although the basic physiologic and physical effects in most domestic animal species are similar to those in humans, hyperbaric protocols are species dependent and cannot be extrapolated from human therapy. Knowledge of behaviors in animals associated with complications that might occur within the pressurized environment is an absolute necessity.

Those who seek to purchase hyperbaric chambers should ensure that they have been designed for specific use in animals. Further, animal chambers should be manufactured according to highest United States standards as put forth by the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME).

Animal hyperbaric chambers are currently designated as Class C chambers by the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). This classification includes the “no human occupancy” rule.

It is recommended that the decision to use hyperbaric oxygen therapy in an animal be made in conjunction with a veterinarian’s assessment of the patient to confirm that this modality has a high likelihood of benefit for the patient’s problem and to assure tolerance of the pressurized environment.

The VHMS is dedicated to the application of animal hyperbaric oxygen therapy in a safe and efficacious manner. It is imperative that all personnel operating hyperbaric equipment be properly trained.