How are Clinical Studies Conducted?
It all begins with an idea. A clinician, resident, intern, technician or student may have a patient with a specific condition that does not respond to traditional therapies. This could lead to a “what if” moment—“What if we try this combination of chemotherapy drugs?” or “What if there is a genetic link to this condition?” or “What if there is a better way?”

After the idea comes the plan or study proposal. The proposal includes the condition to be studied, species, expected outcome, potential consequences, etc. As outlined in our previous issue of Advancing Health with Clinical Studies, the proposal then goes through a rigorous animal welfare review process prior to submission to potential funding sources.

Once funded, the study begins with recruitment of patients. Clients learn of studies through many sources. UW Veterinary Care staff or local veterinarians may inform clients directly or clients may learn of the study through other means - online, friends, flyers, presentations, etc. Prior to entering a study, the client receives much information on the intent of the study, benefits and risks involved and any compensation. This is known as informed consent. After this agreement is signed, the pet is screened to determine if it meets all of the requirements to enroll in the study. The next steps vary greatly depending on what the study entails. The patient may undergo simple testing such as radiographs (x-rays) or blood tests, all performed on one day. However, the study may be much more involved, for example, when trying a new treatment for cancer that includes multiple hospital visits.

Whatever the study entails, the welfare of the patient always comes first. If a patient becomes stressed, uncomfortable or experiences unexpected side effects the study stops and provides a back-up plan for continued support of the patient.

Studies generally enroll a set number of patients to provide enough data to evaluate the study results. The number of patients and length of enrollment is determined within the study proposal. Upon completion, all of the information is analyzed to determine the most important findings of the study. Results are often published to share the investigator’s knowledge with others. The entire process may take several years to complete.

For more information, please visit our website: uwveterinarycare.wisc.edu/clinical studies