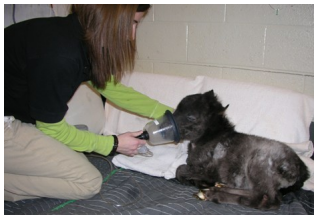
Gift, a 5 ½ week premature miniature horse filly, was brought to the Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital at Oklahoma State University Center for Veterinary Health Sciences with severe breathing problems. She needed help if she was going to make it.

“When the foal arrived as an after-hours emergency, she was in severe respiratory distress,” explains Dr. Todd Holbrook, assistant professor, Equine Internal Medicine. “Breathing normal room air, her arterial oxygen level should be close to 100. Even after putting her on oxygen, her oxygen level was reading 50.”

When all hospital patients check in, a veterinary student is assigned to each case, along with a resident, an intern and a supervising faculty member. The Veterinary Teaching Hospital is where fourth year veterinary students experience hands on clinical training and interns and residents receive additional training. In this case, Renee Mead was the student assigned to the premature miniature foal, along with equine medicine intern Dr. Ryan Royse.

“The owner named her Gift as she was certainly a special girl,” smiles Mead. “Gift literally requires 24 hour ICU care and that’s what we’ve been giving her.”

Gift was given about a 10 percent chance of survival. A feeding tube was placed in her tiny body. She was started on steroids for her acute respiratory distress syndrome and placed on antibiotics for aspiration pneumonia. In addition to the oxygen, Gift had to have nebulizer treatments several times a day.



“In a case like this, many people help care for the patient,” says Dr. Holbrook. “ Drs. Devine and Hart and a senior student on emergency duty helped when she was admitted while Renee, other veterinary students, our technical staff, the foal team, Dr. Royse, and I were all involved in her intensive care. It’s a team effort.”

After one week, the feeding tube was removed and Gift was taught to drink from a bottle. The little foal spent nine days on oxygen and now she is able to maintain her blood oxygen adequately breathing room air.

“We’re fitting Gift for shoes to help her fetlocks, which were dropped due to tendon laxity associated with her premature birth,” explains Dr. Holbrook. “She should be able to go home soon after being here 2 ½ weeks.”

“She weighs 26.4 pounds,” adds Mead.

According to Dr. Holbrook, little Gift should not suffer from any long term affects. Because she will grow up to be someone's pet and not a competitive race horse, she should have no outward signs of her early struggle to survive.

Her current caretakers, Gift has a very strong will to live despite all the odds against her—being born as early as she was. She is home and her two week post-veterinary hospital visit showed her lungs were clear and she is gaining weight and strength daily.

Gift and her owner are most grateful to Drs. Holbrook, Royce, Renee Mead and the rest of the staff who provided their loving 24-hour care. She is now a much loved and spoiled filly at home, kicking up her heels to show how much better she feels.