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“It all started when I won a potbelly pig in a raffle,” smiles McDaniel. “Five years ago, someone gave me a second pig. Then people started calling saying things like I have a potbelly pig and I’m getting a divorce and I can’t take care of it anymore. Can you take it? There’s no place for them to go in Oklahoma so I decided to fill the void.”

McDaniel currently has 48 pigs at Hamalot Farms. She has placed 80 pigs in the last five years and has had as many as 66 pigs at one time.

Josh had been vaccinated and two weeks following his castration, he became ill.

“He had a stiff-legged gait,” recalls McDaniel. “He was unable to right himself after falling and he would assume a “dog-sitting” posture.”

Josh’s behavior deteriorated quickly. The 8-week old piglet began to exhibit seizure-like activity and paddling all four limbs. He also started having respiratory difficulty and began frothing at the mouth.

McDaniel decided it was time to take a trip to her local veterinarian, Dr. Lou Anne Wolfe, OSU Class of 1999.

“Dr. Wolfe treated Josh for seizures, which seemed to help,” says McDaniel. “When I didn’t see any improvement overnight, she referred me to the OSU Boren Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital’s Food Animal Clinic.”

Each case that checks into the Veterinary Hospital is assigned a fourth year veterinary student,

an intern or resident and a senior clinician. Josh's case was given to Sharla Birch, Class of 2008, and Dr. Katie Simpson, Food Animal Medicine and Surgery Resident. Senior clinicians on the case were Drs. Robert Streeter and John Gilliam.

"The first thing we did was give Josh a physical exam," explains Dr. Simpson. "We checked his general body condition and recorded his weight of 9.1 pounds. Josh couldn't sit upright on his own. He was over responsive to external stimuli and was having muscle spasms. Josh appeared to be having a hard time breathing as well."

Dr. Simpson and Sharla discovered that Josh's temperature was low (97oF). A healthy potbelly pig's temperature will range from 101.5oF to 102.6oF. His pulse was racing at 114 beats per minute (bpm) when it should be between 90 and 100 bpm. His respiration rate was also higher than the normal 25 to 40 bpm at 44 bpm.

Dr. Simpson ordered a blood count to determine Josh's red blood cell count and white blood cell count. She also ordered a complete chemistry panel for the young pig and a urinalysis.

"We were trying to rule out other diagnoses, but at that time our main differential diagnosis was tetanus," says Dr. Simpson.

The veterinary team began treating Josh presumptively for tetanus. He was put on oxygen to help his respiration, a catheter was inserted, and IV fluids started to get the little potbelly pig on the road to recovery.

"We gave Josh a mask, ear plugs, and nasal oxygen and put him in a dark room," says Dr. Simpson. "We closed the door and allowed minimal visitation to decrease auditory stimuli as much as possible. Every four hours, we turned him from side to side while he rested."

The team concluded that Josh was in fact suffering from tetanus. His castration incision was opened, flushed with hydrogen peroxide and chlorhexidine diacetate, and then left open to drain.

Josh's recovery was slow. He seemed unresponsive to the IV diazepam to relax his muscles. His inability to open his mouth required him to be tube fed.

"And we had a hard time keeping his catheter inserted," smiles Birch. "The tetanus caused muscle spasms. When the muscles are tense, the blood vessels are difficult to find making insertion of a new catheter even harder."

After an infection at the catheter site was diagnosed, the catheter was removed and Josh was given ice and alcohol baths to bring his temperature down.

"Once Josh was past the critical stage of his illness, it was time to start him on food and to get him moving again," says Dr. Simpson. "We began performing physical therapy on him multiple times per day, and started feeding him soft food from a syringe. He really liked canned pumpkin!"

They used a supportive sling designed to help Josh walk with assistance. Birch worked with Josh daily.

"It was exciting to see little improvements that Josh made each day," says Birch. "Tetanus in pigs is rare to see and successful treatment of one is even rarer. I'm happy that Josh's 'mom' decided to pursue treatment with him."

"Josh's improvement was slow but steady. And after a hospital stay of more than two weeks, he was definitely much better," adds Dr. Simpson.

Approximately 19 days later, the little 2 month old potbelly pig was well on his way to a full recovery.