

Post to the future

For years scientists have predicted an avalanche of breakthroughs in medicine due to the development of gene technology. Whilst in historical terms, medicine has advanced at an exponential rate for decades, for those with potentially curable gene disorders it must feel that things are happening at a snail's pace.

A recent trial of gene therapy in dogs however, shows how close we are getting to the genetic revolution. In a collaborative effort, scientists at the Lions Eye Institute in Perth and Columbia University in the US have recently restored sight to 14 congenitally blind Briard dogs.

These dogs were studied because of a genetic disorder (that also occurs in humans) which makes the dogs unable to produce a protein needed for the light receptor cells. Genes for the protein were spliced onto a virus which was then injected into the dogs, which then started producing the missing protein link, and hey-presto, now they can see. Many other conditions are also being researched in dogs using kennel club records, stored blood and tissue samples collected over decades, just waiting for the technology to catch up to make use of them.

Dogs and human share a huge percentage of the same genes, and research into canine genetics will have a spin off to both man and his best friend.

Kind Regards,

Scott & Chris