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## **Cause of otter death given**

### **Necropsy shows anesthesia reaction likely killed Murray**

BY NADINE PARKS  
The Post and Courier

Necropsy results on Murray the otter indicate the South Carolina Aquarium attraction likely died of an adverse reaction to anesthesia.

The results aren't definitive, said Dr. Pamela Parnell, a veterinary pathologist who performed the necropsy at Clemson Veterinary Diagnostic Center. Animal deaths from anesthesia are relatively common, and a more extensive examination wouldn't be performed unless a complaint were filed and the issue was taken up by the state Board of Veterinary Examiners, she said.

The anesthesia was administered by Dr. Thomas James Sheridan, principal veterinarian for the aquarium. Sheridan said he properly anesthetized the otter when he performed a routine physical at his office May 17. He said he did everything he could when Murray stopped breathing on the trip back to the aquarium, including breathing into the otter's mouth through a tube and performing CPR.

'I feel terrible. Nobody likes to lose a patient,' Sheridan said. 'As a professional, you feel like you've let people down. But you have to remind yourself that these things happen.'

Sheridan, 39, a veterinarian at Folly Road Animal Hospital, was disciplined in 2000 after complaints of animal mistreatment involving a cat and a dog, state records show. He's been the aquarium's veterinarian since 2000 and had administered anesthesia to otters about 20 times without any problems, he said.

Aquarium President Kevin Mills said he's confident that Sheridan is providing the best care for the facility's 7,000 animals, mammals, fish and more.

'I see no causal relationship between the unfortunate death of Murray and the charges levied against Dr. Sheridan in the past,' Mills said. 'In our employ he has provided exemplary care for our collection. The incidents that are attributed in the case have not been present at any degree in his conduct and his care for our collection.'

Sheridan said Wednesday the complaints that led to his arrest in 2000 were made by two former disgruntled employees, one of whom he had fired a short time earlier.

The Charleston County Sheriff's Office arrested Sheridan on Aug. 11, 2000, and charged him with ill treatment of animals, according to records. A magistrate dismissed the charges a week later after determining the law excludes veterinarians, but the state veterinary board then took up the issue.

The board found that Sheridan violated a different state law when he threw an unruly dog on its side and squeezed its neck and snout until the animal was out of breath and that he failed to adequately monitor a cat who died while under anesthesia. The board ordered that he be fined \$500, pay administrative costs of \$4,556, undergo a psychological assessment, attend an anger-management class and complete a 15-hour anesthesia course, according to the board's final order document.

Sheridan said he volunteered to do all of that prior to the board's hearing in order to regain his operating license, which had been suspended pending the outcome of the case. He said he completed all of the board's requirements.

'The sanction imposed is consistent with the purpose of these proceedings and has been made after weighing the public interest and the need for the continuing services of qualified veterinarians against the countervailing concern that society be protected from professional ineptitude and misconduct,' the final order reads.

Mount Pleasant resident Marcia Rosenberg, who has lobbied lawmakers for legislation that would require the state to make complaints against veterinarians public record, has taken issue with Sheridan's employment at the aquarium since the facility opened in 2000.

'I am outraged. It's been a great concern to so many people, given Dr. Sheridan's history,' she said. 'The board at the aquarium, they know his history, and they have a fiduciary responsibility for the care of those animals. They have to answer for something like this.'

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