

THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

Search and Rescue With a K-9 Nose

Five years ago, Dr. Eva Briggs became a search and rescue volunteer in Tompkins County, N.Y., a hilly region in the central part of the state marked by gorges, farmland, and a population of more than 101,000.

Dr. Briggs subsequently acquired Boomer, a border collie puppy, to train for search and rescue work. Now almost 3

years old, Boomer has not participated in formal search and rescue operations, but he did earn certification in wilderness air scent from the International Police Working Dog Association in October 2009.

"I've always liked being outdoors, plus I've always liked dogs, so once my kids started getting older, I thought, 'This might be an interesting thing to try,' "

said Dr. Briggs, a family physician who lives in Marcellus, N.Y., and has a master's degree in environmental forestry from the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse.

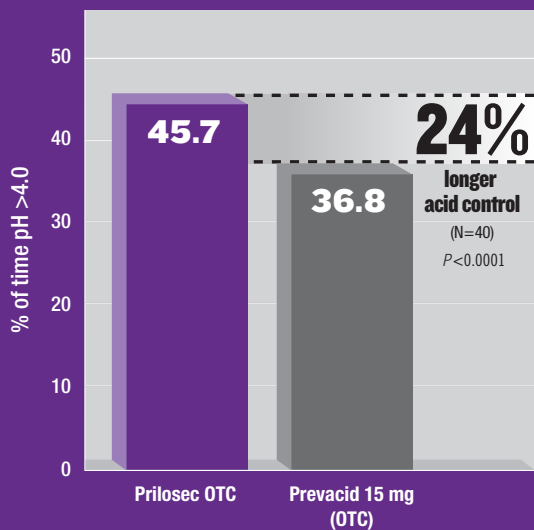
"In an actual search, the canine team would be assigned a specific area, say 40 acres," said Dr. Briggs, who works at two

urgent care centers operated by Cayuga Medical Center in nearby Ithaca, N.Y. "The dog will find any person whose scent he detects. When the dog finds the subject, he comes back to me and gives his trained indication, which in the case of my dog is a bark, and then he leads me back to the subject."

Boomer may be relatively new to search and rescue, but Dr. Briggs has long been acquainted. She began her

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[†]Prilosec OTC is indicated for frequent heartburn as a 14-day course of treatment or as directed by your doctor. Not for immediate relief.

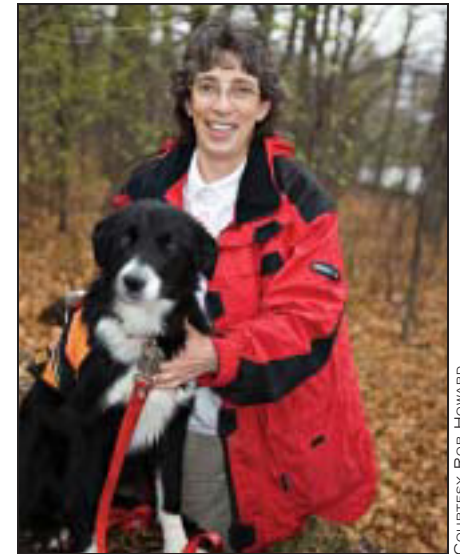
[‡]The correlation of pH data to clinical outcome has not been directly established. Data were collected at steady state, on Day 5.

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Dr. Eva Briggs is training her dog Boomer to help in search and rescue.

volunteer post armed with the know-how of map reading and compass navigation, thanks to her graduate work in environmental science and forestry and her love of the outdoors.

As one of about 15 volunteers for Tompkins County search and rescue, Dr. Briggs has participated in several searches as a "ground pounder," a person who combs through terrain searching for people who are lost or injured.

In addition to assisting on the ground, her commitment as a search and rescue volunteer involves attending monthly training sessions and business meetings. She is a member of the committee that plans and carries out the training sessions. "We also do public relations and teaching and interacting with the public, which can be really nice," she said. "I've even written some book reviews for the National Search Dog Alliance."

As for working with Boomer, "I probably do something training-wise every day, and something specific to search and rescue 2-3 times a week. It makes me go outdoors no matter what the weather is," Dr. Briggs said. ■

By Doug Brunk

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The purpose of "The Rest of Your Life" is to celebrate the interests and passions of physicians outside of medicine. If you have an idea for this column or would like to tell your story, send an e-mail to d.brunk@elsevier.com.