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“She’s feeling much better than she did before the surgery, which is what we were hoping for,” Hughes said. “Until you get inside an ape, sometimes you don’t know what’s going on.”

The incision has “healed beautifully,” Hughes said, and Knobi no longer needs pain medication.

Shumaker said the ape is locomoting as she did before, moving about the aerial structure where she lives with ease. “She is moving confidently and behaving completely normally in every way,” he said. “We are thrilled with her excellent progress.”

Knobi’s incision healed in about 10 days and she was re-introduced to [Allie](#), an adolescent orangutan with whom Knobi enjoys a special bond. A few days after that, the two females were re-introduced to [Azy](#), a 29-year-old male. All of the reintroductions were uneventful and the three apes seemed to be happy to be reunited, Shumaker said.

Although the apes were separated in the days immediately following Knobi’s surgery, they were always in close enough proximity that they could always see, hear and even touch each other through mesh as the incision healed. Knobi’s follow-up care was mindful of her best interests, which is why she was never placed in isolation, Shumaker said.

Last spring, a medical examination revealed a benign fibroid tumor about an inch in diameter on Knobi’s uterus, a condition that is common in human women, but the medical team decided not to remove it unless problems persisted. When Knobi again become symptomatic in mid-August, the medical staff thought the tumor might be the cause of her pain, irregular reproductive bleeding and a recurring urinary tract infection. When the symptoms persisted despite treatment with an antibiotic and ibuprofen, the Great Ape Trust veterinary team made the decision to transport Knobi to Iowa State’s Veterinary Teaching Hospital for surgery.

Hughes said the medical team first attempted a laparoscopy, a procedure in which an instrument somewhat like a miniature telescope with a fiber-optic system brings light into the abdomen, but were unable to see the cause of the problem because of fibrous scar tissue. Instead, Knobi underwent a laparotomy, a procedure in which an incision is made in the abdomen, and her ovaries were removed.

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The procedure was similar to one routinely performed on human women, according to Hughes. Because of the presence of scar tissue and the possibility of trauma, the medical team elected not to remove Knobi's uterus, as would normally be the preferred treatment course in human women. However, Hughes said hormonal changes resulting from the removal of the ape's ovaries likely will cause the tumor to shrink.

On the day of her surgery, Knobi was anesthetized before leaving The Trust and was transported to and from Iowa State in a cargo van outfitted as a veterinary suite. Public safety officers at The Trust provided an escort to and from Ames.

"The Iowa State folks were just exceptional," Shumaker said. "It was a phenomenal team effort here on campus and by Iowa State and Dr. Leeds."

Assisting with the surgery from Iowa State were Dr. David Merkley, professor of small animal surgery, and Dr. Steve Leshem, a small animal surgery resident. Also participating were Dr. Tricia Beasley, intensive care/small animal surgery intern; Dr. Kristina Miles, associate professor of radiology; Dr. Bonnie Hay Kraus, clinician in anesthesiology; Dr. Andrew Claude, resident in anesthesiology; Dr. Dean Riedesel, professor of anesthesiology; Cindy Wooledge and Rachael Bodkins, both small animal surgery technicians; and Mandy Hoyt, a senior studying anesthesiology.

Dr. Sally Prickett, director of the Veterinary Teaching Hospital, and Dr. Robert King, senior veterinary clinician were also on hand during the procedure.

GREAT APE TRUST BACKGROUND

Great Ape Trust of Iowa is a scientific research facility in southeast Des Moines dedicated to understanding the origins and future of culture, language, tools and intelligence. When completed, Great Ape Trust will be the largest great ape facility in North America and one of the first worldwide to include all four types of great ape – bonobos, chimpanzees, gorillas and orangutans – for noninvasive interdisciplinary studies of their cognitive and communicative capabilities.

Great Ape Trust is dedicated to providing sanctuary and an honorable life for great apes, studying the intelligence of great apes, advancing conservation of great apes and providing unique educational experiences about great apes. Great Ape Trust

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of Iowa is a 501(c) 3 not-for-profit organization and is certified by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA). To learn more about Great Ape Trust of Iowa, go to www.GreatApeTrust.org.

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Insights Through Collaborations with Apes