

THE DENTAL VACCINE: A NEW BREAKTHROUGH IN THE FIGHT AGAINST PERIODONTAL DISEASE

DR. SCOTT LINICK, DVM, FAVD

MEDICAL ISSUES

Many greyhounds are afflicted with severe dental disease. Signs of this disease include halitosis, gingival inflammation, gingival recession, bone loss and tooth mobility. These are the signs of periodontitis.

Canine periodontal disease is caused by bacteria naturally present in the dog's mouth. The bacteria grow into plaque on the teeth, which if not removed, hardens into tartar. The bacteria multiply and infect tissue below the gum line. They release harmful toxins that damage the gums, the periodontal ligament (which holds the tooth in its socket), and the bony socket itself. This deep infection is called periodontitis and may be painful to the dog. Furthermore, the bacteria from the mouth enters the bloodstream and can cause broader health problems including heart, liver, or kidney disease.

Now there is a new weapon in the battle against periodontal disease! Pfizer has developed a new vaccine against the bacteria that are most often isolated in dogs

with periodontal disease, the Porphyromonas species. Dogs receiving the Porphyromonas vaccine should develop an immune response to these bacteria, which are responsible for much of the bone loss associated with periodontal disease. The vaccine was tested to be safe in dogs as young as 7 weeks of age and as old as 15 years. The USDA conditionally released the vaccine in November, 2006, realizing the need for the vaccine, its safety and efficacy. Currently studies and field trials are being conducted to prove long-term efficacy in order to gain full approval for the vaccine.

It is important to realize that the vaccine is a preventative measure and not a treatment for periodontal disease. Also, it is to be used as part of a total preventative dental health program including professional cleanings and home care.

For Greyhounds, with their predisposition to severe periodontal disease, I feel this vaccine is a very valuable tool. At our practice, we administer the vaccine to

Greyhound puppies and young dogs before periodontal disease occurs. For adult dogs with existing dental disease, we recommend a thorough dental cleaning and administering the vaccine at that time. The vaccine is administered in 2 doses, 3 weeks apart with boosters every 6 to 12 months depending on the severity of the case. *Remember, home care in the form of brushing, rinses, dental foods or chew toys is a must.*

In the past, the only way of treating periodontal disease was through the mechanical removal of plaque and tartar. Now we can get to the root of the problem by neutralizing the harmful bacteria before they do their damage.

Dr. Scott Linick practices at Plainfield Animal Hospital in South Plainfield, NJ. He has been a Fellow of the Academy of Veterinary Dentistry since 1997.

