

Unraveling Health Problems in Dogs

By Margaret Pough, Delegate Finger Lakes Kennel Club

The AKC Delegates' Canine Health Committee has approved this article and its distribution is encouraged

HEALTH ISSUES

Any dog of any breed can have health problems. Dogs can become infected by viral and bacterial diseases, internal and external parasites, and exposed to environmental toxins. Is a problem seen in a puppy or an adult dog the result of an inherited trait or due to external factors such as toxins or an infectious disease? Each individual dog in the world carries some "bad" genes that can be expressed at different times during the development of the fetus, in the growing puppy, or later in life. We as breeders have a profound influence through our breeding programs. The environment in which the dog lives can influence the expression of some genes, as can nutrition and husbandry. In many cases breeders just say "oh, the pups died." Or "the dog died" As a biologist I want to know why. As breeders and owners we need to know why. Follow-up testing may help us differentiate between genetic, environmental, and infectious causes of disease.

Transmissible Diseases:

With the introduction of Pet Passports, dogs are traveling abroad to shows, or on vacation with their owners. Dogs may be exposed to exotic parasites and different infectious diseases. We must be aware that our dogs may become infected with "exotic" diseases even when we travel within the USA. A dog may contract an infection that is seldom seen where we live. It is important to take your dog to your veterinarian if your dog gets ill after traveling or attending a show. And is important to tell your veterinarian where you have been.

People constantly jump to conclusions when a dog exhibits clinical

signs similar to those seen with a common disease. When dogs are ill pursuing diagnostics help us differentiate between different infectious diseases, environmental causes and inherited traits. Virus isolation identified distemper, parvovirus, and the equine influenza virus that circulated in the greyhound tracks last spring. This latest virus has been reportedly seen in rescue dogs, and could readily become a problem in show dogs if an infected dog went to a show. However, respiratory disease has

"Only through proper diagnostic testing can we identify, and work to prevent exotic diseases from entering our canine population"

many causes, and a rescue dog in transit that was presumed to have the "Miami Crud" actually had distemper. Another dog had aspiration pneumonia due to megaesophagus associated with adult onset myasthenia gravis.

Canine Brucellosis is common in puppy mills, and in free roaming dogs in many parts of the south; all dogs coming into Rescue should be tested. Neutering will prevent shedding in bitches, but infected males may still harbor organisms in their prostate gland even after neutering, and may be potential shedders for extended periods of time. Antibiotics may mask infection and blood cultures a month after the end of treatment are required to determine infection sta-

tus.

An imported rescue puppy was diagnosed with Rabies last spring.

Dogs from subtropical countries may harbor intestinal and blood borne parasites, as well as viral and bacterial diseases. Leishmaniasis was previously found predominantly in returning military dogs. The vector is the sand flea. As importations from Mediterranean regions and subtropical regions become more common, more cases of Leishmania have surfaced.

In addition, Leishmania has been found in some foxhound packs, but a vector has not been identified. Only through proper diagnostic testing can we identify, and work to prevent exotic diseases from entering our canine populations.

Viruses, bacteria, or protozoa may cause gastrointestinal illness. The common assumption I hear is that there is a "new Parvo." If a dog dies, it is very important to have a necropsy performed to help us determine if we are dealing with an emerging disease, or a different variant of a known infectious entity.

Diagnostics empower us and help us produce healthy dogs. DO NOT ASSUME. Persuade your veterinarian that YOU NEED to know. Be willing to pay for necropsies on dogs that die. Get in touch with Veterinary Colleges or Universities for help in diagnostics for infectious, environmental and inherited diseases.

- 1 WORK WITH YOUR VETERAN-
ARIAN
- 2 SHARE INFORMATION
- 3 PURSUE DIAGNOSTICS
- 4 BE WILLING TO HAVE
NECROPSIES PERFORMED
- 5 KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

