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NEWS & EVENTS

Early Diagnosis, Attentive Owner Keep Dog's Disease in Check

Brutus was recovering from knee surgery a few years ago when his owner, Carol Morris of Columbia, took him and his half sibling, Panda, to the local dog park. They returned home on the brisk winter day and Moore noticed that her young dog's eye was swollen. Thinking Brutus may have gotten something in his eye while playing at the park, she brought him to the MU Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital where he was examined by the veterinary ophthalmology service and treated for a severe case of uveitis, or inflammation inside of the eye. While diagnostic tests ruled out an infection or tumor, the cause of the problem was not immediately determined.



Dylan Buss, DVM, MS, Diplomate, American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists, who was at the time a veterinary resident in comparative veterinary ophthalmology at the Teaching Hospital, re-examined Brutus when Morris returned with the blue chow for a follow-up visit 10 days later. Buss had recently read a study about uveodermatologic syndrome (also known as

VKH-like disease in dogs), which is a condition that manifests with both ocular and dermatologic lesions. This disease more prevalent in Akitas, Chow-Chows, Siberian Huskys and other northern breeds, and it is thought to be due to an immune mediated response against melanin. Buss, together with his faculty attending clinician, noticed that a spot below Brutus' nose had developed a pink tinge, indicating a possible loss of pigment. He also determined that the uveitis appeared consistent with uveodermatologic syndrome. Although there is no diagnostic test for uveodermatologic syndrome, a skin biopsy, the presence of uveitis, depigmented skin lesions and Brutus' breed supported the diagnosis.

"I was told, if we didn't treat it, Brutus could get glaucoma and go blind," Morris said. "I'm not willing to let him go blind on me."

Ann Bosiack, DVM, an ophthalmology resident at the Veterinary Medical Teaching Hospital, has been helping to treat Brutus for more than two years since his original diagnosis. She said that while uveodermatologic syndrome is not curable, it can be controlled with immunosuppressive medications. Brutus is on a regimen of immunosuppressive drugs that have helped him avoid devastating visual complications such as detached retinas.

"A lot of times, the disease is quickly progressive," Bosiack said, "but Brutus is doing really well." Bosiack credited Morris' attentiveness for the ophthalmology section's success in staving off the progression of the disease. "A lot of his success thus far has to do with the owner. She brings him back in to see our service as soon as she notices any depigmented lesions on his nose, tongue or lips so that we can modify his medical treatment before the disease causes more damage to his vision."

Morris, in turn, said she appreciates how reassuring Bosiack has been throughout Brutus' treatment. She said she also likes to utilize the services of the Veterinary Teaching Hospital because she welcomes the opportunity to help veterinary students learn about an uncommon disease, as well as gain experience treating a Chow-Chow, a breed that some people find intimidating.

"I figure it's good for my dogs as well as the students. I enjoy bringing him over. As much as anything, it gives me confidence that he's continuing to do well."

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