

A Case of Steroid Responsive Meningitis (SRM) in a Clumber

Steroid Responsive Meningitis is a condition that primarily involves a dog's central nervous system. It is a relative uncommon problem but has been identified in a wide range of young adults in "larger" breeds e.g. Beagles, Bernese Mountain dogs, Boxers, PBGVs, Scottish Deerhounds and Springer Spaniels but not as far as we know in Clumbers. Due to the wide range of symptoms diagnosis may be particularly difficult if the dog has a history of fore limb lameness or neck pain.

Cervical pain, shaking, hunched back stance, fever, lack of appetite, stiff neck, muscle spasms (especially in front legs and neck), lethargy, and unwillingness to move can be noted and these symptoms may appear quickly. The dog may be hesitant to bark and opening of the jaw seems to be painful. Some affected dogs may cry out in pain with the slightest attempt of movement. There are reports of blindness and limb paralysis associated with this syndrome. As dogs tend to be stoic and as such the owner may not be able to pinpoint initially exactly what is with the problems initially being attributed to an injury or infection.

Diagnosis can be a challenge and thorough physical and neurological examination, laboratory tests, spinal fluid analysis, X-rays, and CT scans may be involved. However vets will opt to start high dose steroid treatment without tests to support diagnosis as the dog will respond quickly making the expense of testing unnecessary.

Treatment with steroids at decreasing levels may continue for two months. Weaning off the medication is gradual as there have been dogs that relapse where the steroid therapy was discontinued too rapidly. While most dogs may grow out of the condition it is reported that others may have to stay on steroids permanently.

In our case Bella had irregular shoulder pain when touched for a few days before other symptoms developed. She seemed depressed, stood with a hunched back and walked reluctantly and stiffly. The vet found she did not like to have their head gently moved up and down or side to side in addition to the neck pain. She also had a temperature of 105F. Initially she was treated with Metacam and antibiotics but when she showed no improvement over the weekend a tentative diagnosis of SRM was made, she was taken off Metacam for two days and put on steroids.

We have asked for this case to be reported in the Newsletter as there is a possibility of a genetic predisposition to SRM and we would encourage all owners to report incidents in case Clumbers have a hereditary predisposition to develop this disease.

Rod Weston