

Learning from Pearl

Westie owners and lovers like Lynne Sedotto want others to learn from their experiences with the deadly lung disease, idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (IPF), also known as Westie Lung Disease and she wants veterinarians to do a better job of making diagnoses of IPF.

The unconditional love and devotion Westies give is undeniable in the breed and Sedotto's Westie, Pearl, was such a friend. Sedotta lost two Westies prior to getting Pearl in 2005, one to old age and the other to Addison's Disease and their friendship began just after Sedotta, herself, completed treatment for colon cancer.



Pearlie Mae

“She was a joy – she loved without condition. She loved being held, being with other dogs, cats and every human she met,” said Sedotto.

Pearl started to have trouble breathing a few years ago but Sedotto said at first, she didn't think much of it. Then, she noticed Pearl would need

breaks to catch her breath after running. She mentioned it to her veterinarian but only after several complaints about the dog's shortness of breath was a chest x-ray performed and a diagnosis of a collapsed trachea was made. Pearl's symptoms persisted and she was given Theophylline but the drug offered no relief.

Sedotto asked for a second opinion with an internal medicine specialist. The specialist thought the dog may have IPF, but called it mild at most.

Back at her local veterinarian, the trachea collapse seemed to show slight improvement and so when Sedotta asked the doctor about having Pearl's teeth cleaned, and the doctor believed it would be okay for her.

The anesthesia proved to be too much for Pearl. She never regained her pre-anesthesia ability to breathe and her ability to walk was greatly diminished. She could only walk a few feet before coughing and needing to rest. Her breathing was increasingly labored and becoming more difficult.

On July 7, Sedotto awoke to find Pearl gasping for air and choking. She took her back to the vet who'd diagnosed her with a trachea issue. Three injections, an antibiotic, a diuretic and a steroid were prescribed but nothing seemed to help. She was taken back to the specialist who after doing an echocardiogram, delivered the devastating blow that Pearl had a limited time to live. The specialist again voiced that Pearl likely had IPF and had developed pulmonary hypertension, as well, a common comorbid condition and it had intensified her condition.



Pearlie Mae

At best, the doctor believed Pearl could stabilize and prescribed a compounded medication he'd hoped would buy her a little more time. It took an hour for the local pharmacy to prepare the medication for Pearl as she panted aggressively. As Sedotto attempted finally to administer the medication to her pet, Pearl died in her arms.

Looking back Sedotto realizes there wasn't much likely that could have been done to save Pearl from IPF as there are no therapies to slow the disease, stop it or even treat the debilitating symptoms. She believes, however, that veterinarians need to be more familiar with IPF and its symptoms to better help their patients and their owners. And, she believes the onus is on owners of Westies to investigate on their own, challenge a diagnosis if they are not comfortable with it and seek a second opinion.

Sedotta says she is also concerned for Westies, at large. “I have to say that I'm very concerned with the general health of the Westie breed. I have had four Westies since 1990 and only one lived to the age of 15,” she said.

Sedotta says breeders hold the key to diseases like IPF and Addisons. “Looking for a cure or a medical treatment is not the only answer.”