On The Health Front

By Kay McGuire, DVM, MS

As the Vice President of Health, I feel that I am on the front lines when I hear from Westie owners that have dogs afflicted with a health problem. Our Westies are not just pets, they are family members and most owners are tuned into their dog's nuances early. One of the health problems that is being reported more and more is kidney disease.

As our dogs age, we expect that they will encounter "old age" conditions just like their human counterparts. The body simply wears out if there is not a specific disease cause. Renal (kidney) disease is one of the most common causes of death but we have been seeing an increase in the condition at a younger age.

We have done histopathology on affected kidneys on dogs passing younger than 10 years of age and are finding the diagnosis of renal dysplasia. Renal dysplasia is a hereditary disease reported in many breeds of dogs and the exact mode of inheritance is unknown. Veterinarians think of Shih Tzu's and Lhasa Apso's when you discuss this disease. In the Shih Tzu breed, inheritance is thought to be an autosomal dominant gene with incomplete penetrance. Renal dysplasia can also be associated with in utero infections such as herpesvirus-s in puppies.

Renal dysplasia is characterized by abnormal development of renal tissue and disorganization of development of the renal parenchyma. Immature glomeruli will persist in the kidney past 6 months of age and secondary degenerative and inflammatory changes occur as the disease progresses. The rate of progression of disease varies but clinical signs are typical of kidney failure with increased thirst, urination, dehydration, lethargy, vomiting and weight loss.

If you have lost Westies to early kidney disease, please do a pedigree search and see if it can be correlated to other dogs that have passed. I believe the prevalence is much higher than we realize.

The WFA is anticipating a very informative lecture on this topic and Uretheral Carcinoma at our annual Health Seminar on Thursday, October 3, 2019 at the Kimberton Fire Hall.

Working on genomic research under the tutelage of Matthew Breen, PhD at North Carolina State University, Dr. Claire Willey will present us with pertinent information on diagnostics and treatment.