

CHRONIC HEPATITIS IN STANDARD POODLES

2017 RESEARCH UPDATE

In a recent study funded by PCAF, David Twedt, DVM, DACVIM and colleagues at Colorado State University investigated chronic active hepatitis in Standard Poodles to better understand the disorder and any possible genetics involved. The team studied about 50 Standard Poodles, some with chronic hepatitis and some with "reactive" hepatitis secondary to an intestinal, pancreatic or other problem.

In chronic cases, the researchers found no cause for the hepatitis. Chronic hepatitis in some breeds can have a genetic piece, and Dr. Twedt mentioned the Colorado team's search for gene mutations that may cause copper-storage hepatitis in Dalmatians, which runs strongly in families. But they found no evidence of that in the Standard Poodles studied, as pedigrees of study dogs revealed no patterns. At the university's clinics, chronic hepatitis is no more common in Standard Poodles (0.5 percent of patients) than in all other dogs (0.3 percent), but Dr. Twedt noted that the researchers would need to study many more dogs to determine whether Standard Poodles as a breed are especially susceptible to liver inflammation.

He said his current thinking is that a virus, environmental toxin or possibly organisms in the intestine may trigger hepatitis. Then inflammation and its products may incite the immune system to attack liver cells, setting an escalating autoimmune process in motion unless the problem is treated. Much can be done for dogs with hepatitis, but they often don't appear sick until the liver is severely damaged. About 2/3 of the dogs in Dr. Twedt's study improved on anti-inflammatory treatment, and 1/3 did not. Of course, this may partly reflect whether treatment began before liver damage was advanced.

So what is Dr. Twedt's advice to breeders? He wouldn't breed any sick dog but wouldn't shy away from relatives of dogs that had chronic hepatitis, because at this point the researchers have no evidence that the disorder is genetic in Poodles. Just in case the breed is especially susceptible to liver inflammation, he said, it's a good idea to run routine blood panels every year or so to catch organ problems early. Because the liver is "detox central," it's also a good idea to avoid toxins as much as possible in a dog's food and environment.

In an exciting new initiative, Colorado State researchers are planning to explore the use of stem cells to treat chronic hepatitis in dogs and potentially replace damaged tissue with normal liver cells.

Dr. Twedt emphasized that he would be more than happy to talk to your veterinarian if you have a Poodle with suspected liver disease. He can be reached at david.twedt@colostate.edu.

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