Warby St Vet Hospital Newsletter

and Wangaratta Equine Hospital

SUMMER 2011

It's Summer time again, although the weather has been quite mild and wet much like last year. It's time to enjoy daylight savings, BBQ's and Christmas holidays. Season's Greetings to all.

Supermarket Dog Flea Treatments Poisonous to Cats

This topic is unfortunately a perennial favourite for the education of our clients. It is something an owner will only ever do once after they see the effects, but it is something that occurs periodically in practice especially at this time of year when fleas are becoming a growing problem again.

The problem occurs when certain supermarket sold "spot-on" flea treatments for dogs are used on cats. These products contain pyrethroids, which the cat has a very poor tolerance to. The products are always labeled "for dog use only", but this can often be missed on the packaging by the owner. In many cases the owner has just put the leftovers on their cat thinking they will save a bit of money.

The pyrethroid compounds cause a neurological toxicity in the cat, which develops slowly in cases where the compound is absorbed through the skin. If the cat licks the treatment off their back then signs can develop more quickly and be more severe. Initially the cat may show excessive salivation and ear flicking. Signs of incoordination then develop and eventually the cat may begin to seizure. Without treatment the poisoning is usually fatal.

One example of the packaging shows "toxic to cats" but is easily missed.

If you have applied a dog flea treatment to your cat the best thing to do is to immediately wash the cat with dishwashing liquid and rinse it repetitively with clean warm water. This will wash the compound off their coat and hopefully prevent any signs of poisoning. If your cat is showing signs of the poisoning they need to be taken to the veterinary hospital. The treatment focuses on controlling twitching, tremoring and seizuring with anti-convulsant medications or general anaesthesia. In most cases the cat will recover, but recovery can take several days and by that stage your cost savings from using the leftovers will have well and truly been obliterated!

Inside this issue:

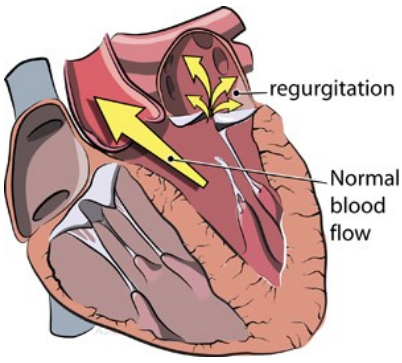
Christmas and Pets

Now is probably a good time to trot out all the annual warnings about pets at Christmas time.

Our pets tend to have more sensitive stomachs than us and where we may feel a little bloated and weary after the better part of half a ham and turkey our dogs and cats could be feeling much worse. Rich fatty foods like poultry skin and pork meats can cause pancreatitis, especially in dogs. This condition causes intense abdominal pain, vomiting and lethargy. It may lead to quite an extended hospital stay over the Christmas break. It is also a common time to see intestinal obstructions from objects ranging from stonefruit seeds, to satay skewers or even pieces of new Christmas presents that look particularly appetising.

Finally, as we all are probably aware, a new pet isn't just for Christmas. Make sure that the decision to get a new pet (especially for someone else) is a well thought out and planned one.

Mitral Valve Insufficiency



The mitral valve is positioned between the atrium and ventricle on the left side of the heart. Its chief function is to close securely when the ventricle contracts, which prevents any blood flowing backwards through the heart. A properly functioning mitral valve is essential to maintaining normal output from the heart and therefore normal circulation throughout the body.

The most common type of heart disease we see in dogs is associated with a failure of this mitral valve to close securely. When this valve becomes "leaky" the majority of the blood still flows forwards from the heart, but a small amount will squirt backwards. This results in two things. The first is a turbulent backflow of blood that we can hear as a heart murmur, and the second is a reduction in the heart's output and a pooling of blood behind the heart from the continued backwards flow.

The body is able to detect the reduced output from the heart and puts in place a series of mechanisms to try and help the heart beat harder to normalise the cardiac output. These mechanisms work very well in the short term, but as time progresses their effects actually hinder the efficiency and ability of the heart.

To treat this type of heart disease we use three types of drugs. The first is a diuretic (usually frusemide) that helps to reduce the blood volume so the heart doesn't have as much blood to pump around. One of the major problems we see as heart disease progresses is the build up of fluid on the lungs due to blood pooling in the pulmonary vessels. This is often very evident as the animal coughs a regular moist cough. Diuretics are very effective at shifting this fluid and making the animal breathe more easily. The second type of drug is a called a positive inotrope, a fancy phrase, but basically a drug that helps the heart beat with better force to promote forward flow of blood. The third drug is an ace inhibitor, which opposes the many mechanisms the body has to deal with heart failure that work very well in the short term, but become a major hinderance in the long term.

Continued developments in heart medications for dogs have meant that the treatment of mitral valve insufficiency is now much more effective and safe. The use of proper medication in these patients can greatly extend their lives and also ensure their quality of life is very good during this period as well.

Newsletter Mailing List

We had a single computer meltdown recently at Warby St Vet Hospital and as a result the hard drive was irretrievably damaged. We had developed a mailing list for emailing the newsletter to interested clients. Unfortunately this list was lost when the computer decided it had reached it's life span. We apologise to anyone inconvenienced by this computer failure and invite everyone to provide us with your email addresses again so that we can continue to deliver the quarterly newsletter electronically. You can either email me your address at tim@warbyvet.com.au or fill out the slip below and return it to Warby St Vet Hospital or Wangaratta Equine Hospital in person or by snail mail.

YES! I'D LIKE TO RECEIVE THE QUARTERLY WARBY ST VET HOSPITAL NEWSLETTER BY EMAIL!

NAME: .....

EMAIL ADDRESS: .....

"KING VALLEY RUN"

A service provided every **TUESDAY** charging travel fees from:

Glenrowan, Greta, Moyhu or Milawa.

"BEECHWORTH AND MYRTLEFORD RUN"

A service every **THURSDAY** charging travel fees from:

Markwood, Everton, Beechworth, Myrtleford

Stringhalt in Horses

Stringhalt is an involuntary, exaggerated flexion of the hock during walking, and can affect one or both hindlimbs. In Australia it can occur in outbreak form, related to the ingestion of flatweed (Hypochoeris radicata, also known as cats ear or false dandelion). Other plants suspected to play a role include dandelion and capeweed, but good evidence of any role these plants play is lacking. It is not yet known how the weed affects nerves, but it causes a peripheral neuropathy. Not all horses grazing flatweed pastures will develop stringhalt.

Outbreaks typically occur late summer and autumn, in drought situations where flatweed is ingested where it would otherwise not be eaten by horses. Hay from these pastures is made in late Spring/early summer and not associated with clinical disease when consumed by horses. The Flatweed plant is often confused with the Dandelion because of the similarity of their yellow flowers. However, the pictures below show the difference in the shape of the leaves between the two plants.

FLATWEED

DANDELION

Flatweed is very common around the Wangaratta area, and we had several cases of Stringhalt last Autumn around the King Valley area.

Affected horses appear normal standing, and their general health is good, although sometimes they may find it difficult to graze. It effects the long nerves in the hind legs, and the left recurrent laryngeal nerve (nerve innervating the larynx). Abnormal movement is seen when the horse begins to move, and the hock is brought up quickly to the abdomen (sometimes kicking the horse), held there for a moment and then stamped to the ground. Mildly affected horses may only show this movement when they are backed or turned. They may show a 'bunny hopping gait' at the walk or canter. Horses may also make an abnormal noise when exercising, temporarily becoming 'roarers' due to the laryngeal nerve involvement and subsequent L side laryngeal paralysis.

Most horses recover without treatment over several months (as long as they are removed from the pasture), but in some complete recovery takes over a year. Severely affected horses may not recover. A medication is available that can get some improvement in clinical signs, but the signs return a couple of days after treatment is discontinued. A surgery which involves cutting tendons in the legs has been advocated in the past, but is no longer recommended as it is not a reliable method of correcting the problem. Realistically the most important thing is to remove the horse from the affected pasture so they can graze good quality feed. Or better still avoid any situation over the Summer and Autumn that would see a horse on poor enough feed that it would consider grazing the flatweed.

Dr Sarah Cavill BVSc

Flystrike

Humid conditions over the past month have led to an increased incidence of fly strike in sheep. The primary blowfly responsible for fly strike is *Lucilia cuprina*, The adult fly is approx 10mm long, and has a bright green shiny body. The hairy maggot fly (chrysomya ruficacies) is a secondary strike fly, which will breed on carcasses and strike after a *Lucilia cuprina* strike.

Fact: adult flies will not travel more than 3km from where they hatch during their lifespan.

Breech strike on ewes, and pizzle strike in wethers is the most common. Urine leads to moist conditions on the skin, causing a dermatitis that is very attractive for the flies.

Management practices can significantly reduce the incidence of fly strike. Mulesed sheep have a very low incidence of breech strike. Timing shearing and crutching to be around peak blowfly period (early spring to late summer/autumn) will have a big impact on the number of cases seen.

Some excellent chemical products exist to prevent and treat fly strike. The newer class of insect growth regulators give long lasting protection against flies (up to 14 weeks). This class provides excellent prevention, but other compounds (such as organophosphates) may be better for treatment of cases. Chemical selection will depend on the season, sheep to be protected, wool growth on the sheep, and chemical residues. It should be decided on an individual farm basis.

Regular monitoring of sheep during the danger periods is essential to minimize losses, as it can cause significant mortality in a mob.

A Dog's Christmas Promises

Christmas is for humans, and I will not ruin the surprises by opening all their presents.
Christmas light bulbs, Christmas ornaments, Christmas stockings, and tinsel from the Christmas tree are not food.
I am the alpha dog, therefore I do not need to protect my new Christmas rawhide from the omega dog by taking it outside to eat when the temperature is 40C..
I will not demolish the Christmas tree and drag the string of lights out into the backyard through the doggy door.
I will not dive into the Christmas tree to get the candy canes (which I will not eat -- paper and all).
I will not eat my Christmas doggie treats until after they're out of the stocking!
I will not even THINK about going underneath the Christmas tree and piddling on the dining room rug.
I will not get into a fight with the bigger dog next door, making my human have to call the vet at Christmas.
I will not get tangled up in the Christmas tree lights and pull the tree down while trying to get at a cat through the conservatory window.
I will not pee on Grandma's Christmas presents that are under her tree as soon as we enter her house.
I will not pee on the Christmas tree.
I will not steal the neighbor's Christmas light bulbs.
The bowl underneath the Christmas tree is not a dog dish. I will not drink from it. It will make me sick.