Animal Crackers

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Eye Clinic

Inherited eye diseases are a problem in dogs and concerned breeders are making an effort to eliminate affected dogs from their breeding programs. PRA (Progressive Retinal Arroathy) is known to be recessively inherited. This term covers a number of diseases of the retina which are clinically similar and eventually result in blindness. The age at which diagnosis can be made is specific for the breed affected. It may be before one year of age or as late as five years of age.

Many cataracts (opacity of the lens) are inherited but some may be associated with systemic diseases such as diabetes mellitus, or with injuries. There is no way to predict how rapidly a cataract will progress and there is no known medicine, treatment or diet which will slow down or prevent the progression of a cataract. Surgery, usually performed on only one eye, restores vision in most cases.

Entropion and Ectropion, conditions in which the eyelids turn in or turn out, may be inherited. They cause irritation and may be corrected surgically. It should be noted that the American Kennel Club's rules state that if a dog's appearance has been changed by artificial means, it is not eligible to compete at championship shows. Eyelid surgery would make a dog ineligible for A.K.C. shows.

Some of the individual breed standards have disqualification clauses, but these refer to the color of the eyes, or eyes of different colors. However, there are standards which state that eyes of different colors are acceptable.

Eye clinics are held in different areas and many eye problems can be detected in these. The clinics provide a mass screening method for the diagnosis of the major inherited eye problems. Because of the organizational nature of most eye clinics, only those diseases recognized with conventional ophthalmologic instruments (indirect ophthalmoscope, slit-lamp microscope) can be detected. Those diseases that need special instrumentation for recognition or early diagnosis, e.g., mesodermal dysgenesis of the irido-coneal angle (gonioscopy and histophotolusia (ultrasound); early diagnosis of PRA (electroretinography)) require examination methods not available at screening eye clinics.

The equipment and services needed for routine and specialized diagnosis of inherited eye problems is available as a clinic service provided by the Inherited Eye Disease Studies Unit (IEDS) at the Veterinary Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania. In addition, the IEDSU staff is actively engaged in a research program on inherited eye diseases in dogs, cats, etc.

Further information can be obtained from:
Dr. Gustavo D. Aguirre, Professor of Ophthalmology
Director, Inherited Eye Disease Studies Unit
Section of Medical Genetics
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Coccidiosis

Coccidia are protozoan parasites frequently found in fecal specimens, although this does not necessarily indicate disease. Coccidiosis should be diagnosed only if there are clinical signs.

Most of the coccida are host specific. At least 20 species infect dogs and cats, and there are many species in most domestic animals. Coccidiosis is economically important in cattle and chickens. One species in rabbits causes severe liver disease.

The life cycle is complex, so good control is necessary. Accurate diagnosis is important. Feces should be removed frequently along with bedding, and fecal contamination of food and water must be avoided. The usual signs of coccidiosis are diarrhea (sometimes bloody), weight loss and dehydration. Young puppies and kittens are most severely affected. Outbreaks can be controlled with sulfonamide drugs. In most cases, coccidiosis is not highly pathogenic.

Coccidioidomycosis is an entirely different disease caused by a fungus so-named because it resembles coccidia. It is a systemic disease, involving the lungs, lymph nodes and other organs. It is limited to certain geographic regions with low latitudes, hot summers and mild, moderately wet winters. The fungus is found in the soil of some of our southwestern states and in parts of Central and South America.

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Health Insurance

Health and Accident Insurance for dogs and cats is now available in many states. The cost of veterinary services can be very high, especially for accident cases and serious illness. Insurance coverage can mean peace of mind if expensive treatment is needed.

The premiums average about $100 annually per animal. Usually there is a deductible which may range from $20 to $250. Plans may pay benefits of $750 to $2500 per illness or injury.

Be sure to read the fine print. Policies usually do not cover pre-existing conditions, vaccinations, elective procedures such as spraying and neutering, routine teeth cleaning, congenital or hereditary defects and treatment for parasites.

Your veterinarian should be able to give additional information on insurance which is available. It can be a great help if there is a catastrophic illness.

Veterinary Students

At the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine, there are 419 students in the four classes. The class of 1992 which entered in September 1988, has 105 members, 72 female and 33 male. In the entire student body, there are 288 women and 131 men.

The number of qualified applicants has been decreasing and this is of some concern. There are 489 applicants for the class entering in 1989, a slight increase over the 475 applying in 1988. One of the problems is tuition. For residents of Pennsylvania (70% of the class) and those from contract states — New Jersey (15), Maryland (4), Connecticut (2), Delaware (2), Vermont (2), New Hampshire (1), Maine (1 every other year) and Puerto Rico (1 every other year) — tuition is $11,943.00 plus a general fee of $620.00 — a total of $12,563.00. For the 8 or 9 students from other states or countries, the tuition is $14,319.00 plus the $620.00 general fee — a total of $14,939.00. Scholarship endowment needs to be increased.

There are places for 109 students in each class. There are very few drop-outs. At present, there are 103 students in the Class of 1989.

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