



10-1-2011

Getting to the Root of the Problem

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A rabbit's persistent dental disease brings owner to Ryan Hospital's Exotic Companion Animal Medicine and Surgery Service for answers

BY ANNAMARIE SARACINO

A vicious cycle...that's the only way I can describe the course of DeWabbit's recurring dental disease," said Gwen Coronway, parent to the disease-prone Holland lop-eared rabbit.

The cycle began in April 2009 when Gwen noticed a fluid-laden puncture forming in DeWabbit's left cheek, which persisted.

"I've been a pet owner for a very long time, and I've never witnessed this type of problem in any of my other four rabbits," said Gwen, who was surprised to learn that dental disease was common to this type of rabbit breed. "DeWabbit never showed any symptoms of discomfort or pain, but the main cause for concern was the fact that he wasn't eating," she said.

DeWabbit's sore persisted and he was losing weight so Gwen sought the help of her primary care veterinarian.

Treating the Symptoms

There, DeWabbit's teeth were trimmed and his abscesses were treated with surgical debridement. An antibiotic and

topical antibiotic cream to prevent further infection were prescribed.

DeWabbit made progress, and, after a few months, had gained back the weight he'd lost.

But in July 2010, the wound reopened, his weight dropped severely and Gwen noticed stark behavior changes.

"I knew something was wrong again when he wasn't eating; he was acting very strangely," said Gwen. "He wasn't hanging around the usual places you would see him in and just seemed to be extremely depressed."

After a return trip to his local vet, DeWabbit was again treated with the same course of fluids and antibiotics.

Surgical Intervention

Six months later, however, his symptoms were back and it was suggested that the rabbit might need surgery.

Post-surgery, De Wabbit was healing nicely until two abscesses appeared on the outside of the rabbit's lower

continued on page 48



continued from page 39

jaw. It became clear that the rabbit would need surgical debridement and implanted antibiotic beads for continued treatment.

Finding the Underlying Cause

Gwen made a call to Penn Vet's Ryan Hospital and prepared for an appointment with Chris Montgomery, DVM, attending clinician in the Exotic Companion Animal Medicine and Surgery Service in order to consider all available options.

"DeWabbit's case of dental disease was severe, but not uncommon in this type of rabbit," said Dr. Montgomery, who examined the rabbit.

DeWabbit's blood work came back normal, so, in order to pinpoint the exact cause of the painful repeat abscesses, Dr. Montgomery ordered a CT scan, which uncovered the cause: DeWabbit had retained roots in his teeth. To fix the problem, surgery would be necessary.

Under the close attention and care of Nicole Wyre, DVM, chief, Exotic Companion Animal Medicine and Surgery Service, and Jeffrey Runge, DVM lecturer of surgery, DeWabbit received a partial mandibulectomy. His facial abscesses were removed as were the retained mandibular tooth roots. Dr. Runge implanted antibiotic beads to help the rabbit heal post-surgery and, after observation in the ICU through the night, an all-clear for release was granted by Dr. Wyre. DeWabbit went home.

Recovery and Follow-up

A full recovery is expected, but it's possible that DeWabbit's dental disease could spread. As a result, he will need to be routinely examined for the possibility of the disease spreading to the right side of his mouth.

"I have recently come to terms with the fact that DeWabbit will have this disease for the rest of his life, but the quality of his life is very important to me," said Gwen. "I will do everything in my power to make sure he enjoys his." ♣



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