2015 American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine (ACVIM) Forum
3-6 June 2015
Indianapolis, Indiana

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Long-Term Follow-Up of Aged Cats Fed Different Sodium Content Diets

Sodium restriction or the addition of sodium to feline diets is a controversial issue in veterinary medicine. There is an argument for and against sodium in various disease states in humans, but it is unclear what dietary sodium level should be recommended for cats. Sodium restriction has been historically advocated for cats in some disease states (particularly cardiovascular and renal), but these recommendations were derived from human medicine. To date, no study has confirmed the benefit of this sort of dietary intervention in cats.

This session reviewed the literature on the effects of sodium in feline diets. Additionally, the results of a recent prospective blinded and controlled study examining the health effects of different dietary sodium levels in cats was presented. Diets containing higher sodium levels reliably increased water intake and urine volume and/or dilution. This is potentially beneficial in treating cats with feline lower urinary tract disease (FLUTD), and a study demonstrated its therapeutic effect on cats with struvite urolithiasis. Blood pressure and hypertension have not been shown to be salt-sensitive in cats, and dietary sodium level does not have an effect on bone mass. The previous literature is inconclusive regarding adverse renal effects of high dietary sodium. The prospective study presented by the author suggests that increased sodium intake does not cause harmful effects on renal function, blood pressure, and cardiac structure and function. More research is needed in larger populations to confirm and better understand the apparent lack of sodium sensitivity in cats.—*Reynolds BS*

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The Healthcare Community's Role In Safe & Effective Animal-Assisted Therapy

Animal-assisted activities (AAA) and animal-assisted therapy (AAT) are the 2 main categories of animal-assisted interventions. Development of an animal visitation or an animal therapy program involves a series of questions, concerns, and logistical challenges that must be addressed. Some of these issues include: location for visits, personnel involvement, infection and allergy control, cleaning protocols, and the health and safety of the humans and animals involved with the program. Participating animals should be over 1 year of age (although age requirements can vary by organization) and well-socialized and -trained. Additionally, animals should be comfortable with crowds of people, friendly, able to stay engaged, able to cope with stressful situations, nonaggressive, comfortable being touched, controllable, predictable, reliable, and in good health. The handler should also be friendly, considerate, caring, self-aware, and knowledgeable about the animal's behavior and the place they are visiting. Formal programs that set standards for both quality and safety of the experience improve likelihood of success. Veterinarians can facilitate their clients' participation by referring them to reputable organizations engaged in AAA or AAT and by ensuring that the animals are healthy. Additionally, more research is needed on the benefits of animal visitation and methods for enhancing the safety of all involved.—*Freeman LM, Olsen CW*

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Forecasting of Heartworm Prevalence & the Impact of Prevention

The Companion Animal Parasite Council (CAPC) has collected a large pool of data from 2011-2014 on the number of antigen positive tests for heartworm that were reported nationwide from IDEXX Laboratories and ANTECH Diagnostics. The data have been formatted into interactive maps, which can be found on the CAPC website. The maps provide an easily interpretable source of information for veterinarians and pet owners regarding heartworm risk and prevalence in dogs that visit veterinarians.

The goal of the maps is to help answer 3 questions: 1) What is the chance a dog taken to a practice in a given area will test positive for heartworm?; 2) Can we predict annual trends for a given area based on certain environmental factors?; and 3) Will it be possible to examine the effects of intervention on reducing heartworm prevalence? An equation was applied to the basic prevalence maps taking into account factors such as climate conditions, socioeconomic conditions, local topography, and vector (mosquito) presence. It was subsequently possible to examine what would happen when there are changes to one or more of those factors. CAPC is working toward being able to predict or forecast trends in heartworm disease. Additionally, the organization is working toward being able to assess the impact of prevention and intervention programs on overall disease prevalence.—*Bowman DD*

Decision-Making in Urinary Tract Infection & Bacteriuria

Bacteriuria may or may not be an indicator of infectious urinary tract disease. Determining when it is clinically significant is crucial in deciding whether or not to treat, thereby lessening cost, side effects of treatment, and the risk of antibiotic resistance. In human medicine, asymptomatic bateriuria (ASB) is easier to diagnose and quantify. In veterinary medicine, the variety of urine-collection methods and the inability of animals to communicate possible subtle symptoms of urinary tract disease, make subclinical bacteriuria (SB) a more appropriate term. Though the broad studies examining ASB in humans are lacking in veterinary medicine, some research has found varying percentages of bacteriuria in pets with obesity, diabetes mellitus, hyperadrenocorticism, or postsurgery (orthopedic) or cyclosporine treatment. Most had no apparent clinical signs. In humans, preemptive treatment of ASB does not seem to eliminate bacteriuria in the long term and may even predispose to a future urinary tract infection (UTI) because of the creation of a more easily colonizable urinary mucosal surface. Preliminary studies indicate that untreated SB does not lead to UTIs in healthy female dogs. SB should spur more comprehensive diagnostic testing to determine the possible cause. Ultimately, the combination of a comprehensive history, clinical signs, and cytology is needed to determine the clinical relevance of bacteriuria. The author concluded that better research is required to provide guidance on the optimal approach to treating urinary tract disease in animals.—*Weese JS*

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