Lingual Lesions

A 13-year-old, intact male golden retriever presented with a 2-day history of lethargy, glossomegaly, and ptyalism. The dog had been treated previously with steroids and had not improved. It then developed inspiratory stridor, anorexia, and dysphagia. On physical examination, fever, inspiratory stridor, ptyalism, enlarged submandibular salivary glands, and excessive swelling and firmness of the tongue and sublingual structures were noted. Differential diagnoses included neoplasia, cysts or polyps, salivary mucocele, infection (eg, bacterial or fungal glossitis), cellulitis, hematoma, and abscess. A complete blood count revealed neutrophilia with a mild left shift and monocytosis. A biochemical panel was unremarkable, and thoracic radiographs were normal. A large, soft-tissue opacity was noted in the mandibular region on radiographs of the cranial cervical area. The dog was placed under general anesthesia and a soft, fluctuant area was palpated on the caudodorsal aspect of the tongue. Approximately 40ml of purulent fluid was aspirated from the area, and cytologic examination was consistent with a lingual abscess. The abscess was lanced and flushed, and the dog was treated with intravenous fluids and antibiotics. Pasteurella multocida and Escherichia coli were cultured from the fluid. The dog was eating and drinking and the fever and glossomegaly resolved the day after the procedure. Three days later, the dog was discharged on antibiotics and had no further problems.

COMMENTARY: The tongue is an uncommon site for infection, and reports of lingual abscesses are rare in the veterinary literature. Diagnosis can be challenging—imaging techniques (eg, ultrasonography or computed tomography) can be helpful in differentiating an abscess from cellulitis or neoplasia, although in this case further imaging studies were unnecessary. Interestingly, the authors’ primary differential of neoplasia was proven wrong and the dog’s problem was relatively easy to correct. A diagnosis of lingual abscess should remain on the list of differentials for any dog presenting with an acute swelling of the tongue.
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