In 2 multicenter studies in Europe, dirlotapide (Slenlrol, www.pfizer.com) was evaluated for efficacy and safety. All dogs had a body condition score of 6 or higher. The study had 3 phases: initial weight loss (n = 196 days); weight stabilization (n = 84 days); and posttreatment, during which body weight was monitored after the drug was stopped (n = 28 days). The dog’s diet had to comprise at least 75% commercial diet that was complete and balanced. Homemade food could comprise up to 25% of the diet. Dogs received either placebo or treatment at an initial dose of 0.05 mg/kg/day for the first 14 days and then 0.1 mg/kg. Dogs were examined and weighed and body condition scores were recorded on a monthly basis. The dose was adjusted based on this information as appropriate during the weight loss and stabilization periods. A total of 245 dogs (164 treatment and 81 placebo) were enrolled in the study. The most common adverse effects were vomiting, diarrhea, inappetence, anorexia, lethargy, and various skin problems. These side effects were more common in the first month. Approximately 13% of dogs receiving treatment were withdrawn by their owners because of side effects. Dogs lost significant amounts of weight (14% to 15.9%) when compared with placebo, and the drug was found to be safe and effective. Study by Pfizer LTD


Pain & Veterinary Technicians

Several studies conducted in the United Kingdom have shown that factors such as the veterinarian’s sex and year of graduation can affect their use of analgesia and pain scoring. In the present study, a questionnaire was distributed via a variety of routes (Internet, mail, after lectures) to veterinary nurses (technicians) to assess their attitude toward assessment of pain and management in clinical practice. More than 1000 questionnaires were distributed; of the 541 returned, 517 were suitable for analysis. Most technicians were 21 to 30 years of age, and only 1.7% were older than 50. Most technicians had been qualified for 1 to 5 years, and only 8.3% had been qualified for more than 15 years. Higher pain scores were assigned to dogs than to cats for various surgical procedures. Ninety-six percent reported that their knowledge and assessment of pain could be improved, and 88% said that they gained their knowledge of the assessment of pain from practical experience. Only 8.1% of practices used a pain scale, and overall, 80.3% said a pain scale would be useful in practice.

COMMENTARY: It is technicians’ responsibility to identify signs of pain, however subtle, in order to improve the patient’s healing process by administering needed analgesia. This article brings to light the efficacy of using a pain scale or scoring system to objectively quantify pain. Pain scales were shown to be a useful clinical tool that the veterinary technician can use in combination with traditional clinical signs of pain for improved management of surgical patients. The article also reports interesting data indicating that both personal knowledge of pain and possible sex differences in pain perception may influence assessment of pain.—Mary Tefend, MS, VTS (ECC)


Hepatozoonosis in the Southern United States

American canine hepatozoonosis (ACH) is caused by an Apicomplexa parasite, Hepatozoon americanum. Dogs are infected when they ingest Amblyomma maculatum ticks that are infected with the organism. Since dogs are not the preferred host of A maculatum, they are probably not the natural reservoir of H americanum. This study evaluated the possibility that cotton rats and white-footed mice in an ACH endemic area in Oklahoma might harbor H americanum. Although the prevalence of Hepatozoon infection was high in the cotton rats (58%) and white-footed mice (33.3%) collected in this study, the organisms were not H americanum.

COMMENTARY: ACH is spreading in the southeastern and south-central United States and has been reported in Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Florida. Dogs have marked leukocytosis and periosteal bone proliferation. ACH is debilitating and often fatal. Infected dogs usually exhibit a waxing and waning course of recurrent fever spikes, muscle pain, and progressive debilitation for up to several months. ACH was first described in the Gulf Coast region in the late 1970s. At first, it was mistakenly thought to be an Old World canine disorder caused by Hepatozoon canis. H americanum was recognized in 1997. Knowledge of the natural cycle could help control the spread of disease.—Patricia Thomblinson, DVM, MS