Viral Skin Infections in Cats

Four cats with skin lesions possibly due to or associated with calcivirus and FeLV were recently described. In the first case report, 2 vaccinated cats underwent routine ovariectomy and 2 to 3 days after surgery were presented for anorexia and depression. No signs of upper respiratory infection were present at the time of admission. Over the next week, 1 cat developed painful necrosis at the surgery site and the second cat developed dyspnea with pleural effusion and tongue ulcers. On approximately days 11 and 9, respectively, both cats developed a diffuse pustular eruption on the abdomen. Calcivirus antigen was detected in the epithelial cells of the pustules. The cat with severe respiratory disease was euthanized, and the other cat responded to glucocorticoid therapy. In the second case report, 1 cat was presented for an acutely pruritic lesion diagnosed as giant cell dermatitis. The second cat developed multiple nodules and ulcerated lesions on the face, feet, and abdomen. Skin biopsy revealed cutaneous, nonepitheliotropic T-cell lymphoma. In both cases, FeLV antigens and FeLV genome were found in the affected skin via immunohistochemical testing and polymerase chain reaction (PCR), respectively. Despite therapy, both cats were eventually euthanized.

COMMENTARY: In the first 2 cases, it is difficult to know for certain whether a relationship between the pustular eruptions and the calcivirus actually existed. Pustular lesions were not cultured in either cat because of immediate prior antibiotic therapy. However, pustular lesions in cats are very rare and the rapid development of these lesions and signs of generalized illness suggest a systemic cause. Neither viral-induced lesions nor a drug reaction can be ruled out as possible explanations. There is less doubt about the cause of the lesions in the second 2 cats. Both reports highlight the fact that viral-induced lesions are underrecognized. Increased availability of both PCR and immunohistochemical testing is key to a better understanding of the pathogenesis of many feline skin diseases. Take home point: If it looks odd, do a biopsy!—Karen A. Moriello, DVM, Diplomate ACVD