Urethral Injury: Watch Those Catheters

There are numerous causes of urethral injuries, including kicks, gunshot wounds, vehicular trauma, penetrating injuries, urinary calculi, or iatrogenic trauma from catheterization or surgery. For dogs, the most common cause is vehicular trauma; in cats, it is trauma associated with urethral obstruction and catheterization. A retrospective study of animals admitted to the veterinary hospital at the University of Pennsylvania from January 1986 to December 2003 studied 20 dogs and 29 cats that were identified as having urethral disruption. Disruption was confirmed by contrast radiography or direct visualization; confirmed cases were included in the study. Males predominated in both species. The most likely indicator for a poor outcome was the presence of multiple traumatic injuries. There was not a statistical difference in outcome based on type of surgical correction, time to surgery, type of urinary diversion, or duration of urinary diversion.

COMMENTARY: In a previous study of 600 animals in vehicular accidents, only 2 had urethral injuries. Unfortunately, many of the injuries reported in this paper were caused by trauma from urethral obstruction and catheterization, especially in male cats. When trying to relieve urethral obstruction, be sure not to push the obstruction with the tip of the catheter.—Patricia Thomblison, DVM, MS or The Editors