Quality of Life After Vision Loss

Sudden acquired retinal degeneration syndrome (SARDS) in dogs is an acute disorder of unknown cause, characterized by sudden vision loss in ophthalmoscopically normal eyes. Blindness is usually permanent. Persistence of simultaneous clinical signs (e.g., polyuria, polydipsia, polyphagia, weight gain) may represent more difficult management issues than blindness. This survey study evaluated long-term outcomes in dogs ($n = 100$) with SARDS using data from owner questionnaires.

Mean age at diagnosis was $8.2 \pm 2.2$ years (range, 4–16 years). Younger age at diagnosis was significantly associated with higher owner-perceived partial vision and quality of life (QOL). Most dogs had one or more concurrent systemic signs, and while most persisted, only polyphagia increased in severity over time. Visual improvement was not detected in any of the 22 dogs in which medical treatment was attempted.

Owners reported that dogs were more cautious, played less, slept more, and had more signs of depression following SARDS diagnosis. However, 37% of owners felt their relationship with their dog improved after diagnosis, and 76% ranked QOL as moderate to excellent. Only about half of owners made special provisions for their dogs (e.g., baby gates, kennels, ramps, carpeted pathways, auditory and verbal cues).

Only 10 dogs were euthanized because of SARDS. Most owners (95%) said they would discourage euthanasia, and because euthanasia may be an indirect assessment of QOL, this suggests that dogs with SARDS likely maintain good QOL.

Commentary

It is incredibly difficult to make a truly objective assessment of our pet’s QOL, so we must rely on subjective data. It is heartening to learn from this study that most clients believe that their dogs have a good to excellent QOL and would not recommend euthanasia after SARDS diagnosis. However, this conclusion may make it easier for clinicians to write SARDS off as a benign condition unworthy of a complete and proper diagnosis. Instead, this study should underscore the importance of a proper ophthalmoscopic and electroretinographic diagnosis of SARDS since the diagnosis of a disease other than SARDS (e.g., optic neuritis, encephalitis, CNS neoplasia) carries the potential for far greater impacts on both QOL and prognosis/life expectancy. We should not just make the assumption that sudden blindness automatically leads to a diagnosis of SARDS.—Caryn E. Plummer, DVM, DACVO

Source


Effect of Early Neutering on Physeal Closure in Cats

Androgens and estrogens accelerate physeal closure by allowing calcium deposition at the physis. In cats, physis have been shown to close at 4–9 months of age, but studies have shown delayed closure secondary to early neutering. This retrospective study sought to further establish this database, focusing on several pelvic limb physis, with a hypothesis that male and female neutered cats would have open physis at a later age than do intact cats.

Pelvic and femoral radiographs ($n = 783$) of cats were evaluated for physeal closure at the greater trochanter, proximal femur, distal femur, and proximal tibia. Date of birth, gender, breed, and neuter status were recorded, but age at time of neuter was not available.

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Commentary

Slipped femoral capital epiphysis (SFCE) remains an interesting yet elusive topic; the body of evidence in domestic animals would suggest that removal of sex steroids by gonadectomy delays physeal closure. As with SFCE in children, other genetic and environmental features play a role.

This study provided findings that varied based on the physis examined. Interestingly, no difference was noted between gender or gonadectomy for the main area of interest in cats, the proximal femoral physis, based on radiographic review at 9 months of age. As only small subsets of each gender and gonad status were compared, the power of the statistical analysis was limited. Clearly, more work is needed to understand the intertwined relationship between sex hormones and physeal closure as it pertains to SFCE.—Jason Bleedorn, DVM, DACVS

Source