Epilepsy in Irish Wolfhounds

Awareness of seizure disorders in Irish wolfhounds has been increasing. Medical records and pedigrees of 120 litters (n = 740) of Irish wolfhounds were reviewed, and the diagnosis of idiopathic epilepsy was identified in 146 dogs (18.3%). This diagnosis was based on a history of more than 2 seizures, absence of other medical problems, absence of an identifiable cause for the seizures, as well as CBC, serum biochemistry panel, and neurologic examination. In 73% of dogs, the first seizure occurred by 3 years of age. Affected dogs were found to have a decreased lifespan of approximately 2 years compared with the nonaffected population. Analysis of pedigrees attempted to identify the mode of inheritance. In this study, the authors propose that the mode is simple autosomal recessive with incomplete penetrance. Male dogs are at increased risk. Breeding programs should be designed to eliminate the disease from this breed.

COMMENTARY: Although Irish wolfhounds are relatively uncommon in most small animal practices, breeders, owners, and potential owners of these dogs should be counseled about the concern of breed-related idiopathic epilepsy. These genetic heritability investigations are important as they lay the foundation for future DNA-based testing to potentially identify affected individuals and eliminate the disease in affected family lines. —Bess J. Pierce, MZS, DVM, Diplomate ABVP & ACVIM