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The Second Opinion and First Aid Kit

Vetspeak - June 1998, Linda Aronson, DVM

The Second Opinion.

Veterinary medicine is, in its way, as advanced and every bit as complicated as human medicine. Add to that the fact that we are not dealing with just one species, but at least four different classes - mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibia - more if you count the parasites and "bugs" - it isn't too surprising that we don't know everything about everything. For that reason, none of us should be ashamed to say, "I don't know".

Beardies, as we know, are not like other breeds of dogs. A friend of mine, who does know his limitations, sometimes at least, once told me my dogs always come up with the weirdest presentations. Indeed they do, they're Beardies.

You should always feel comfortable with your vet. You should not feel foolish about asking questions, because if it's something that is unclear or troubling you, you need to have the situation clarified. If you don't understand the technical language, ask for a translation. It's your animal, you're paying for the vet's opinion, and you should leave the office knowing what, if anything, is wrong; how, if necessary, to treat or manage it; and what is causing the worrisome sign, if you have been told "it's OK, not to worry". If you aren't comfortable, find another vet. There are a lot of us about, and not everyone is going to be a perfect match, however competent.

I had a call last week from a lady who has sought my advice for her Beardies' ailments over the years. Her older male is hypothyroid with mild inflammatory bowel disease - i.e., he's got autoimmune conditions already and therefore is at risk of developing others. His owner was worried. He was fussing around his paws, especially the pads, his nails were growing funny, and very dry and flaky. She took him to her local vet, who cut open a nail, and instead of blood, pus flowed from the vein. I don't believe this vet tried to culture the pus, but put the dog on a broad spectrum (expensive) antibiotic. He continued to fuss, especially licking and chewing at his pads. Textbook in hand, the vet admitted she'd not seen anything like it before, and proposed removing pads and nails to get to the route of the problem. The owner's stomach turned flip-flops. She called a vet an hour away from her, who she trusts. (This vet had recommended she find someone more



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local, for routine care.) The second vet said if she brought her dog to her, and would prefer she did the surgery, she would. The owner called me. I was appalled. No-one was to cut anything off anyone, until we knew why we were cutting. I suggested we did a complete blood count and biochemistry profile, necessary for a dog his age anyway if he was to be safely anesthetized. In addition, I wanted a repeat thyroid panel, he'd not been checked for a year, and an antinuclear antibody (ANA) test. Given the signs and his history, this test which helps diagnose systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) seemed like a good idea to me. I also suggested X-rays of the paws to see if there were any internal changes. Blood should be retained for culture and sensitivity to find an appropriate antibiotic, if necessary. Relieved at surgical reprieve the owner rang off.

In the meantime I was looking through back issues of the Bearded News, the magazine of the Bearded Collie Club (UK). In 1994, there was a flurry of communication on "nail bed infection". Speculation as to the cause was rampant - walking on new tar, kicking back after pottying and forcing bacteria under the nail beds, etc. One thing was striking, the cases which were treated conservatively survived, even if their nails were misshapen. The one case that fell to the surgeon's knife and lost bits of pads and nails, never healed, and had to be euthanized. That poor dog was also assaulted with antibiotics, corticosteroids and antifungal medications because the vet had no clue what he/she was dealing with.

In the American dog's case described previously, the test results were back, and the ANA titer was positive. It's not a 100% diagnosis of lupus, but it's probably what the dog has, and he's being medicated accordingly. (The owner wanted help again. Her dog had lupus onychodystrophy, was this a particularly nasty form of lupus? I reassured her, it just meant his nails were funny looking. How scary, especially if you happen to know that "onco" means tumor.) It seems to me that the British Beardies probably had/have the same problem. No wonder the one dog never healed after surgery, not only was his immune system fighting itself, it was being taxed by a variety of different agents, all of which can be considered to work against each other. The American Beardie isn't out of the woods yet. It's not a happy diagnosis, but at least now we know what we are dealing with, we can provide the appropriate treatment, and pray that it is effective.

So, if something doesn't seem right, don't be afraid to seek a second opinion before you do something irreversible, and potentially life-threatening.



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First Aid Kit for Emergencies.

One caution: never use something that you don't feel comfortable using.

- Emergency phone # list, including vet's #, the nearest emergency clinic, state poison control center (Massachusetts 800 682 9211); ASPCA National Poison Control Center 800 548 2423 (\$30) or 900 680 0000 (\$20 for 5mins, then \$2.95/min). The latter calls are free if sponsored by drug manufacturer, and the 'poison' is a drug.
- A rectal thermometer, preferably not a digital one as they're not very accurate. Use lots of vaseline or K-Y jelly, and only insert about 3/4" on a Beardie. If your dog resists violently, do not persist.
- A watch with a second hand. You should wear this at all times. You can time respirations, heart rates and lengths of seizures etc. A stethoscope is definitely optional. Learn to take your Beardie's pulse.
- Chlorhexiderm flush. You can use this to clean out ears, but it is also wonderful for cleaning open wounds. Chlorhexiderm scrub is also applicable. Nolvasan products are acceptable, I don't like iodine, it can sting and burn.
- Bandaging equipment. Sterile gauze pads, gauze rolls, vetrap and elastic wrap. Don't bandage too tight. Don't use a tourniquet to stop bleeding. In this case, apply a pressure bandage, which is applied tight.
- Scissors - bandage type to cut bandages, and trim excess hair away. If you really get into this, you could use clippers, but that seems like overkill.
- Disposable latex gloves.
- Triple antibiotic ointment.
- Burn cream.
- Kwik stop or similar styptic to stop bleeding of nails which have been cut too short. A sawn off syringe is dandy for applying this where you want it. I tend to just dunk the nail in the pot, but it's not the most sterile technique.
- Ipecac syrup. I hesitate over this one. Some things - caustic ones - do as much damage coming back as going down. If in doubt, call the poison hotline #, and don't give anything until you have their go-ahead. Charcoal may be more appropriate.
- Eye wash for flushing foreign bodies from eyes.
- Forceps, with a magnifying glass if needed.
- A tick remover.



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- Ice packs.
- Tylan. Imodium A-D will work in a pinch, but I go for the most effective treatment when diarrhea strikes.
- Blanket(s)

The list could go on, but that'll cover most basic needs. I strongly recommend you take a pet CPR course, although taking a human one helps in a pinch.