

ACCES for Pet Health

<http://blog.seattlepi.nwsourc.com/accesforpethealth/archives/188711.asp>

Don't Assume: The Case for a Complete Diagnostic Workup

By Beth Davidow, DVM DACVECC



Last week, I got sick. I had fever, cough, and a sore throat. I assumed that I had swine flu, starting taking lots of ibuprofen and cough drops and settled in to wait it out. But then I got worse and worse and by Monday, decided maybe I better go see my doctor. Turns out, I had strep throat. I was much happier 36 hours later when the antibiotics were working. My son was also sick. When I took him to the pediatrician they reluctantly tested him and to their surprise, he also had it. When I called my nanny, she had her son, who also had a cold and fever, tested and he also had strep throat. All of us are much improved with correct treatment.

When I spoke to my brother-in-law, who is a doctor, he said that he has seen a lot of this. People don't come to the doctor because they think they just have the flu but in reality they have pneumonia, or other more serious illnesses. This isn't a plug to go to the doctor for everything but it does mean that things aren't always as they seem.

Why am I talking about my own illness in a blog on veterinary matters? Because it is easy to make assumptions about our own health and make guesses about what might be wrong with our pets, but unless you do the tests, you won't know for sure.

In tough economic times, clients often ask me to guess at what is wrong without the diagnostics. Sometimes I'm right but unfortunately, I don't have the magic Star Trek wand that gives me the answer in all health matters right away. A recent case where the work up was very important comes to mind.

A middle aged male dachshund who lives in the city presented to me for two days of acting uncomfortable, not wanting to move, not eating and he had vomited twice. On physical exam, he had a normal body temperature, normal hydration, but was very hunched and did not want to move. Dachshunds are very prone to problems with the intervertebral discs in their back and this was my first guess. However, normally there is one spot where a dog will cry when you touch the affected disc and this dog did not. I took radiographs and there was a spot that was abnormal in the spine and the rest of the abdomen looked normal. I assumed the vomiting was nausea from pain and gave him an anti-nausea medication and sent him home with pain medication for his back. Something didn't seem quite right to me so I told the owner that if he wasn't better within a day or two, we needed to do a fuller work up.



Diagnostic testing is an important tool in discovering the source of illness.



We called to check on him in 36 hours and he still wasn't eating. We recommended full work up at that time. On bloodwork, we found that he had elevated kidney values, mildly elevated liver values and evidence of infection. We did a urinalysis and it did not appear to be a standard kidney infection. An ultrasound was concerning for an emerging infection so we started antibiotics and sent out titers for a disease called leptospirosis. When the titer results came back 72 hours later, it confirmed that he did have leptospirosis.

Leptospirosis is a disease usually gotten when dogs are exposed to water contaminated with urine from wildlife such as rats, raccoons or opossums. In the past, we have normally seen this in large dogs from rural areas, so the dachshund from Seattle didn't ring alarm bells for me. However, leptospirosis is a zoonotic disease, meaning that it can be transmitted from animals to humans, so it was very important that we got to a correct diagnosis. We reported the disease to the state and were able to talk about precautions to avoid

infection with the owner.

Luckily, our patient did very well after a few days of IV fluids and IV antibiotics and went home with several weeks of antibiotics to clear the infection completely.

My own case and the case of the dachshund remind me that disease and how it affects the body is complicated. We can make educated guesses but things are not always as they seem. When things are not improving, shortcuts can be a mistake and the right diagnostics are really a necessity.

Posted by **Christina Ryan** at December 18, 2009 2:22 p.m.

· [Return to Don't Assume: The Case for a Complete Diagnostic Workup](#)