Breast Cancer in Pets

Beyond Halloween, October is most notably known as National Breast Cancer Awareness Month. WVMA member, Marthina Greer, DVM, of Veterinary Village in Lomira, Wis., is using it to bring awareness to mammary gland cancer in pets.

During the month of October, she and the staff in her clinic wear pink to promote awareness of the disease. In addition, every female dog goes home with a pink, breast cancer awareness bandana. Dr. Greer also takes time to educate owners on mammary gland cancer and the importance of early detection.

Unfortunately, mammary tumors in intact females have a high prevalence rate, with over 50 percent being cancerous. When spayed before the first heat cycle, a dog 's chances of getting mammary gland cancer are less than one percent. As the dog matures, her risk increases with each subsequent heat cycle, Dr. Greer explains.

As with humans, early detection of breast cancer is vital in animals. Just as human females are directed to give a self-breast exam each month, pet owners should also do the same for their female dogs. Any unusual firmness, thickening, or asymmetry should be noted and called to their veterinarian's attention. If any discharge is noticed from the nipples in a dog that isn't lactating, a veterinary exam is needed.

Most importantly, pets should be seen by their veterinarian annually for a wellness exam, and dogs in their senior years (7 years and older) will benefit from seeing their veterinarian twice a year. During the wellness exam, the veterinarian can examine the pet's overall health, provide any necessary vaccinations and answer any concerns or questions the owner may have.

To learn more about breast cancer in pets, contact your local WVMA member veterinarian. Find one online at www.wvma.org .

Permanent Identification Tags FYI

Veterinarians and livestock owners work together to ensure the health of their animals. As described in last month's E-Newsletter article, colored ear tags help them identify animals easily in order to do so. Other forms of identification, such as radio frequency identification (RFID) tags, are forms of permanent identification often used to achieve an industry-wide system for animal identification.

"These IDs can help farm owners, ranchers and their veterinarians make appropriate health and management decisions," says Zachary Janssen, DVM, owner of ZJJ, Ltd., a dairy veterinary services and consulting company, in Delavan, Wis. As animals travel between farms, from farm to show, or from farm to market, the IDs track individual animals.

Permanent identification tags have typically been metal tags, with letters and numbers, inserted in the animal's ear and specific to the animal it represents.

"More recently, the development of RFID technology has led to plastic tags with a 15 digit number and an embedded computer chip. The first three digits of the tag represent the country of origin – 840 for the United States," explains Dr. Janssen.

When veterinarians perform regulatory work, permanent RFID tags allow for accurate tracking free of human error. Testing for disease status, giving vaccinations, enrolling animals in disease eradication programs, and issuing health papers are examples of regulatory work veterinarians perform.

RFID readers, along with computer databases, allow farmers and ranchers to track multiple health events easily throughout an animal's life, according to Dr. Janssen.

"From a management perspective, permanent IDs can be very useful to track the health status and performance of an animal over its lifetime," he states. "The veterinarian can more easily record the medical decisions and treatments for that animal. Furthermore, regulatory paperwork can be more quickly and easily generated."

Dr. Janssen also describes the importance of biosecurity, which is defined as limiting or preventing the spread of disease.

“Veterinarians can help limit the spread of disease on a farm or between farms by first identifying a disease and then recommending vaccination or control programs to minimize or eliminate that disease and its spread.”

RFID tags aid veterinarians in easily and quickly tracking disease and vaccination status.

“RFID tags can be read quickly with a hand-held wand or by a stationary reader as the animals pass by. The most commonly used RFID tags used in livestock are about the size of a quarter in surface area and about the thickness of a pencil,” Dr. Janssen describes.

Dr. Janssen says the best time to apply the permanent IDs is at birth. He also says IDs are often applied when an animal is vaccinated or tested for disease. RFID tags are applied to livestock in the same way other ear tags are inserted, very much like a human ear piercing using a special applicator. The process takes a fraction of a second to complete. Veterinarians can provide training to farmers, ranchers and their employees on the placement of a permanent ID tag.

To learn more about RFID tags for large animals, contact your local WVMA member veterinarian. Find one online at www.wvma.org .