

Genetic Issues In Our Breed

Our breed has few genetic issues compared to other pure bred dogs and way less compared to those “Designer” dogs, as the new mutts are known. I was recently asked to help a friend look into boxers. Knowing little about their health issues, I went to their national and regional clubs looking for information. On one personal web site they referred me to a list from the Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights detailed list of Congenital and Heritable Disorders in Dogs (Dodds, Hall, Inks, 2006). The first thing I did was look into the mission statement of this group. Their mission statement told me not to trust them as a source, but as I continued to research problems in boxers and decided to see what they had to say about our breed, I realized that there are a lot of breeders who must not be reading the mission of this group before linking prospective puppy people to this document.

On the AVAR’s About page on the web site, it was founded to help protect those animals that are raised by humans from the abuse that we humans don’t even know we are doing to our pets. Does this sound familiar? It reminds me a great deal of PETA’s mission. I will let you judge for yourself. Here is the exact quote from their About page.

“In 1981, the Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights was founded by Neil C. Wolff, D.V.M. and Nedim C. Buyukmihci, V.M.D. These veterinarians were concerned that the nonhuman animals they were trained to care for, treat, and heal in veterinary medical school were routinely being used and abused by society, sometimes for the most trivial of reasons. They recognized that the veterinary profession, under the banner of 'adequate veterinary care,' often supported practices which were completely contrary to the well-being of the animals. Thus, the AVAR was formed to educate the public and the veterinary profession to secure higher ideals of humanity and policy toward all nonhuman animals.” (AVAR, 2006)

As my curiosity got the better of me, I went through the list of diseases that are associated with our breed. I have gathered the list from the 334 diseases they say can be inherited in dogs. There are 18 listed for our breed.

“Addison's disease (hypoadrenocorticism): a disease characterized by inadequate secretion of cortisone from the adrenal glands. More common in Old English sheepdogs, standard poodles and bearded collies. (See #159a.)

Atresia of nasolacrimal puncta: a condition where the holes on the inside of the lower eyelids (puncta) are too small or closed so tears spill over the lid instead of draining to the nose.

Cataract: as in humans, a change in structure of the lens of the eye leading to cloudiness and usually to blindness.

Conjunctivitis: an inflammation of the conjunctival membrane of the eye.

Factor VIII deficiency or hemophilia A: the most common severe inherited clotting disorder of humans and nonhuman animals. Inherited as a sex-linked recessive trait (carried by females and manifested in males). Affects most dog breeds.

Hemophilia A: a blood clotting disorder due to deficiency of coagulation factor VIII (this is the most common type of hemophilia in dogs). (See #121.)

Hypothyroidism: a common endocrine disease where the body produces an abnormally low amount of thyroid hormones. An autoimmune destruction of the thyroid gland which affects more than 50 dog breeds. (See #192, 312.)

Lymphocytic thyroiditis: an autoimmune disease causing inflammation and destruction of the thyroid gland, which becomes infiltrated with lymphocytes (white blood cells) and leads to hypothyroidism. This is the most common endocrine disease of the dog and has an inherited predisposition. (See #166, 312.)

Lymphosarcoma: a cancerous condition involving the lymphatic system. One of the more common canine cancers.

Osteochondritis dissecans: a specific form of inflammation of the cartilage of certain joints which causes arthritis. (See #221a.)

Osteochondrosis: a group of developmental diseases resulting in abnormal formulation of joint cartilage. Commonly involves the shoulder, stifle, hock or elbow. (See #221.)

Perianal adenoma: a cancer arising from a cell of a gland found near the anus.

Pulmonic stenosis: a condition where one of the valves of the heart does not open properly.

Retinal dysplasia: a condition where the retina is malformed.

Skin neoplasms: any number of tumors arising from cells of the skin.

Stomatocytosis: disorder where red blood cells have a mouth like shape leading to frequent bouts of hemolytic anemia, and increased red cell osmotic fragility. (See #13.)

Thyroiditis: an autoimmune inflammatory disease of the thyroid gland. (See #166, 192.)

von Willebrand's disease: a type of bleeding disorder caused by defective blood platelet function. Occurs in 59 dog breeds but most often in Doberman pinschers. An autosomal trait affecting both sexes." (Dodds, Hall, Inks, 2006)

Now, I have heard of some genetic issues in our breed. I even remember Liz Hansen talking about research in von Willebrand's disease at a national in St. Louis, but I don't remember her saying this was found in standard schnauzers. If I were a person looking to purchase a puppy and found this list for any pure bred dog that I was thinking of purchasing, I don't know that I would not change my mind depending on which breed I was looking to get. There are few breeds on here with little or no inheritable diseases, but that makes sense as almost all breeds have some form of genetic problems. It also takes someone reporting these diseases to this group before they add the disease to the list for a breed. I found an older list from 1997 that only showed standard schnauzers with ten or twelve of these diseases. I did not see epilepsy or cardio myopathy on the list, yet I know both exist in our breed. At least I knew of cases in the past 10 years for each of these diseases.

I do agree that there is a thyroid issue in our breed on occasion as are some of these other diseases, but I believe the issue may also be partly environmental, just as cancer can be. I have watched news stories about my area of the country and the higher rates of cancer in dogs that are found here. It makes me wonder what exactly we are doing to our air and how much of the diseases we find in humans and animals are created by humans in the first place with our pollution.

The disease list from AVAR is a prime example of why getting information from the internet is not always the best way to gather honest information. It is information like this document that can lead people to think along the same lines as PETA when it comes to pure bred dogs.

It is also why the health survey the SSCA is working on is very important. The actual list of diseases for our breed won't be known if breeders and owners alike don't report their dogs health issues. I am very interested in this survey and getting as much data as possible from it.

The health survey will teach all of us breeders what we need to look out for, what kind of testing we really need to be doing to ensure happy healthy puppies for future generations.

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Reference: About (2006) Retrieved September 29, 2007 from <http://www.avar.org/about.asp>
Dodds DVM, W Jean ; Hall DVM, Susan; Inks, Kay: Guide To Congenital and Heritable Disorders In Dogs (March, 2006). Retrieved September 28, 2007 from http://www.avar.org/pdf/publication/brochure/dog_disease_guide.pdf