

Canine Arthritis Management

by **Hannah Capon** MA Vet MB MRCVS, Director, Canine Arthritis Management

OUR wants from owning a dog have changed dramatically in the last few decades, from a utility to a companion and family member. Our rising expectations regarding their longevity has matched the rate of developments in improved pet healthcare, meaning we not only want our dogs to live longer, but we now make that happen.

Unfortunately certain diseases are more prevalent in our older pets such as arthritis. It is believed that 80% of dogs over the age of 8 suffer some degree of arthritis, and considering the main clinical finding is pain, this must be considered a welfare concern.

Arthritis is a source of both acute and chronic pain. Acute pain is something we are very familiar with. The stubbing of a toe, or the burning of a hand. Acute pain has a well recognised role in protecting our bodies from harm. It creates a reactive pain, one to which you are forced to act and thus prevent further harm. You are likely

to violently withdraw from the source, vocalise your pain, both actions which are very visual and readily linked with pain.

Chronic pain is different and there is still indecision regarding its true role as it doesn't fit with our understanding of the evolution of the species. Chronic pain is not only long term in nature, but it is physiologically magnified pain which means the bearer experiences more pain than is actually present, for longer periods than the cause of pain exists for. It's insidious, burning, fluctuating pain. This kind of pain isn't expressed in a sudden pronounced reaction, it debilitates the bearer over time, causing them to modify their posture and capabilities, change their movements and lifestyle, as well as causing emotional strain and depression.

It is well recognised in the human medical sector examples of conditions causing this type of pain being diabetic neuropathies, cancer pain,

fibromyalgia, irritable bowel, migraines and arthritis. It is less well recognised in our senior canines because owners don't see sudden changes that they can pick up on. Instead they see a slow decrease in activity, reduced energy levels, less or short lived enthusiasm for exercise, which are often categorised as just slowing down, or just getting old, and not acted upon.

But it is important that we recognise the signs of pain promptly, as if left it leads to both mental and physical exhaustion, poor quality of life and premature euthanasia.

Through identifying signs of discomfort in your dog sooner, you have more chance of controlling it, and improving your dogs quality of life for longer.

CAM

Canine Arthritis Management (CAM) is a new initiative created by a small animal vet based in Brighton, motivated to improve arthritis awareness due to seeing endless euthanasias due to the dog 'going off its back legs'. Hannah Capon set up CAM with the primary aim of raising awareness about arthritis and chronic pain: both its diagnosis and, importantly, its management.

Canine Arthritis Management is not a replacement for the dog's normal vet; it's an additional support service ensuring that a true multimodal approach is being implemented by the owner.

Key to this is a free online resource (www.caninearthritis.co.uk) for owners, vets and practice nurses, as well as other social media platforms such as Facebook Canine



Arthritis Management, Twitter CAMarthritisis and the popular Instagram CAMarthritisis.

“I started CAM by accident really. I was a vet frustrated by my limited affect on my arthritic patients. I felt I was a one trick pony with regards to management and I wanted to offer my clients and their dogs more. I was learning about combining therapeutics for better pain control, but that wasn't enough, so I completed a diploma in Galen Myotherapy which taught me to identify compromised dogs through looking at their posture, their physique and their behaviour. It opened my eyes to how the pain of arthritis isn't just localised to the diseased joint, but how it is dispersed through out the body through weight shifting from the painful area to a new area that then subsequently becomes painful itself through overwork, and that by alleviating that I could reduce the dogs true pain state.

Through working in the owner's home and offering long consultation sessions, I started to get a real feel for what owners wanted, and what their understanding of arthritis was. I saw how the majority lived, where and how they exercised their dogs, and the expectations they put upon their dog. I encountered misunderstanding with regards to identification of clinical signs, exercise expectations, diet, homecare, and medical care. I regularly saw owners that loved their dogs getting it wrong and I felt strongly that there should be good quality independent advice out there for owners to tap into. The internet was a minefield with outlandish product claims, persuasive marketing strategies preying on emotionally vulnerable owners that just wanted to do the best for their dog. There wasn't a safe online site that offered non biased, proven, multimodal therapy options.

Through making owners aware that arthritis kills, we can help them identify signs earlier, act sooner and increase not only the length of their dogs life but also the quality. People have grown to terms with cancer and heart disease being major causes of death, but not arthritis, and I believe



this is because we would never dream of putting a person to sleep due to arthritis, so owners would never believe that we would do that to a dog.”

Through the creation of this extensive free online resource, Hannah hopes to help empower owners to initiate their own multimodal approach, through giving independent advice on lifestyle, nutrition, exercise and drug therapy.

THE BIG WALK

To raise awareness of arthritis and chronic pain Hannah and her 14-year-old Collie Holly will walk the South Downs Way this September. They will walk the 100 miles over 8 days, camping along the route. Holly will walk and travel in a special dog cart for rest periods. They are already on a strict training regime to ensure they are match fit!

We are encouraging local dog owners, dog walkers, trainers and groomers, as well as vets, vet nurses and veterinary staff as well as other animal health professionals such as physios, acupuncturists, osteopaths etc to come join for parts of the walk from Winchester to Eastbourne, to share their experiences and help spread the word.

Find out more:
www.caninearthritisis.co.uk/thebigwalk.

It is emphatically NOT a replacement for regular trips to the vets, but is designed to offer help and advice, and to give vets a resource to help owners continue to manage this condition at home.

“What I've found is that no matter how hard I tried to convey advice to owners in the consult room, only a small percentage of that advice was going home with them.”

Hannah practises what she preaches in her local area, with a service visiting owners in their home. There she does a full assessment of the dog's condition and capabilities, the home environment and exercise regime, and devises a personal plan which may include hands-on therapy. “For the last 3 years I have run this rewarding service and hope to inspire other vets and nurses to embrace this approach,” says Hannah.

“It's been a priceless learning curve for me; accessing the owner and their dog in the comfort of their own home, with no space or time pressures.”

Hannah Capon has been working with colleagues to create a practice lecture programme aimed at educating and enthusing practices to use their resources better and create OA clinics. If you are interested in practice talks and upcoming CPD events, contact Hannah Capon at hannah@caninearthritisis.co.uk

