

Peppers' lucky escape



Vet Mike Rodway-Williams wanted to share with you Peppers' story....

Pepper, a 4year old 41kg Bull Mastiff, was brought in this month for being 'off-colour' for a few days. Her owner had noticed she seemed to be drinking and weeing more and was now off her food. She had finished her season about four weeks beforehand and been fine until the last few days leading up to her visit.

Her temperature was at the high end of normal and apart from a malodorous mucky discharge from her vagina nothing else appeared amiss.

The combination of polydipsia (excess drinking) and polyuria (excess urination), a mucky vaginal discharge, inappetence and a recently finished 'heat' are typical signs of a life-threatening condition called PYOMETRA which means pus-in-the-womb.

An ultrasound scan of Pepper's abdomen confirmed multiple hoops of distended, fluid filled uterus.

We usually see this condition in middle aged bitches. Whilst it can occur at any time in a dog's life and does affect a few young dogs, for it to happen to a 4 year old dog is not typical.

Without getting too technical it is caused when at the end of the season progesterone from the ovaries encourages the lining of the womb to grow and thicken in anticipation of fertilised eggs. This occurs with every season but over the years the lining thickens. This condition (called cystic endometrial hyperplasia) can eventually create conditions that are perfect for bacteria to proliferate.

As these bacteria grow and die they breakdown and release substances called endotoxins into the blood. These antagonise the control of urine production by the kidney and hence one sees the excess drinking to compensate for water loss. At their worse they cause true endotoxaemic or septic shock where they completely mess up the body's ability to control where blood goes and at what blood pressure. Left unaddressed this is fatal. These endotoxins also get trapped with the body's defensive antibodies in the filtration beds in the kidneys causing permanent renal damage. This is why it is important to assess if renal damage has occurred as this too left untreated eventually is fatal.

Fortunately in Pepper's case the diligence of the owner meant we caught the problem in time. This condition can have a profound effect on a bitch's electrolyte status and thus the cardiovascular systems ability to cope with an anaesthetic. We prefer to initiate fluid therapy and start intravenous antibiotics as soon as possible. Once the dog is stabilised an ovariohysterectomy is performed to remove the pus filled uterus. This must be done extremely carefully due to very large blood vessels and a uterus full of pus. If any of the contents of the womb escape into abdomen a septic peritonitis could be fatal.

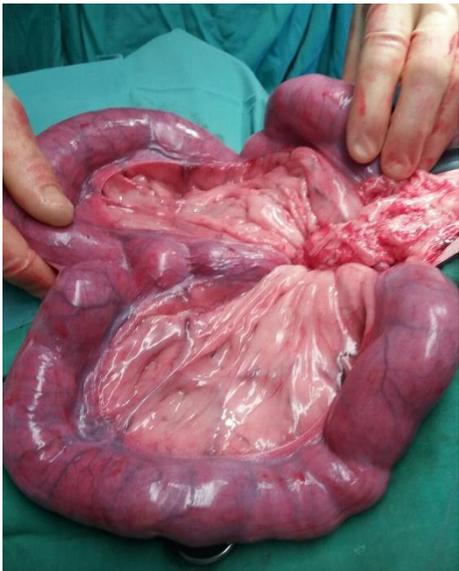
Pepper's surgery went well and after an overnight stay and some 'Ambleside nurse TLC' she was discharged to a much relieved owner.

If you do not intend to breed from your bitch we usually advise neutering within the first 18 months and certainly would suggest before the age of 5 as a cut-off point if you aren't sure.

Although after Pepper's narrow escape I will probably say 4 years of age now!



Pepper feeling much better after having her Pyometra removed.



Peppers uterus
About 4x the size it should have been!!