

Pet Talk Tuesdays – 10/3/2019

Nick Rusch:

Time for our Pet Talk Tuesday. Joining us in the studio, Dr. Marty Greer, from Veterinary Village in Lomira. Dr. Greer, how are you doing?

Dr. Marty Greer:

I'm doing great. Thank you.

Nick Rusch:

Are you staying dry?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Not really, but I'll dry out. It'll be okay.

Nick Rusch:

One of the hazards of your work that we never talk about, the smell of wet dog.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. Not just the smell, but the feel of wet dog too.

Nick Rusch:

Yeah.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. They come in with muddy feet and they jump on you and then you smell like wet dog and it's a great job.

Nick Rusch:

It's a treat. Isn't it? It's just a treat.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It is, it is.

Nick Rusch:

Well, today an important topic and this will sound, I'm sure to some people who are unfamiliar or unaware, it may even sound a little silly, but this is an honest to gosh concern among pets. We're talking about breast cancer awareness, in cats and dogs.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yes. So, October is breast cancer awareness for women. So we're going to include dogs and cats in that as well. We celebrate this every October at our practice, as we have since 2011, with some important initiatives so that clients are aware and we can manage early detection for our dogs and cats.

Nick Rusch:

Okay. First of all, I guess that, that begs the question, how do we detect in dogs and cats?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, dogs and cats don't get mammograms. So we do it all on feel, and it's something that we can teach our clients to do. It's something all of our veterinarians do at their office visits and it's something the groomers can also do. So, it's really quite simple just to feel the mammary chain. Dogs and cats come with typically five pairs of mammary glands. So it's easy for us to teach owners how to do this. It's easy for us to do it, and it's a really important thing to do, primarily because it is one of the top three most common kinds of cancer in dogs. It's not as common in cats, but in cats, it's nearly always fatal. So about 95% of cats with mammary tumors die with their disease, only a small, tiny percentage of dogs do, but it's still very common.

Nick Rusch:

This will sound like an odd question, I'm sure, but you and I have chatted about so many different diseases that are common to your pets and to human beings. And this also, I think in a broader sense talks about... Kind of goes to research and ways that animals can help us. I know we call it cancer, but is it the same disease in pets, as it is in human?

Dr. Marty Greer:

It is. There's a number of different kinds of cancer that it can be, but some of them significantly overlap. We do see inflammatory mammary carcinoma in dogs, which is the most serious kind as I understand it in women, but we see that in dogs as well. So yeah, it's very similar. A lot of the tumors that we find on the mammary gland of dogs, if we catch them small and we catch them early, they'll be benign, but they still need to come off because what happens to a little growth is, you watch it and it becomes a big growth, and the bigger it becomes, the more likely it is that it becomes malignant. So it's important that we do early detection and that we do early intervention. We don't have chemotherapy and we don't have radiation therapy, in general, for our pets. There's a little bit of radiation we can do.

There's no chemo for dogs and cats with breast cancer. So it all has to be managed with early detection, which like I said, is your fingertips. So we recommend that dogs get checked once a month. If women own the dogs, it's easy for them to remember. They do theirs, they do the dogs. Check them on the same day of every month, so you kind of get into the routine. But in our practice, we call it the Pink Paw, because it's really important to us that we explain this and talk to our clients about it. I'm wearing pink all...

Nick Rusch:

I noticed that.

Dr. Marty Greer:

All of October. Everything I will wear at the office and hopefully in most of the rest of my life will be pink. And pink's not my favorite color, but I have a whole section of my closet now, that's turned pink. So it's just an easy thing for us to talk about.

Nick Rusch:

How prevalent is it in dogs and cats? You mentioned in cats, it's almost always fatal. How prevalent is it in each? And is it growing or is it going away or is it holding steady?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well, that's a great question in both dogs and cats, spaying does protect them against mammary cancer. So there's a lot of discussion about whether we should spay young like we used to, or if we should start to push that back. If we spay before the dogs or cats are two years old, we hardly ever see breast cancer. It reduces the incidence significantly. So if we can still let them go through a couple of heat cycles, spay them when they're sort of young, but not babies and get some good protection. So I think those are important questions. Cats, we maybe see one or two cases a year. In dogs, there will be days we'll see one or two cases a day. So it is really common in dogs. Really, really common. So it's really important that we get the word out, teach owners how to do this.

Dr. Marty Greer:

For October in our practice, every female dog that comes in, will go home with a pink bandana if she'll wear it. We hand out stickers, we teach clients how to do this. If a client finds a lump on their dog's mammary chain, and they're concerned, or their cat, they're concerned that it might be breast cancer, if we've seen you in the last six months, you can come in. One of my technicians will check your dog for free and then if there's some concern, then one of the doctors will come in and take a look. So we really take this quite seriously in our practice in Lomira. So, like I said, we do a lot with this in October. We'll have information on our website. We have actually a Facebook page called Pink Paw. So, we'll be posting information on that.

I think it's just really important that clients recognize that early detection is the only real chance that we can have to make a difference in our pets life expectancy, by surgical intervention, because a big tumor is a lot more likely to be serious and have already spread. The bigger the dog, the bigger the tumor, the more likely it is to be malignant. Little dogs, little tumors, a lot more likely to be benign. So as soon as you find anything that you think might be a lump on your dog's mammary chain or breast, then you want to intervene by going into the veterinarian and talking about surgical intervention and getting those off as quickly as possible.

Nick Rusch:

And you guys will perform that surgery, as well?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yes. Yeah, for sure.

Nick Rusch:

That's the big option.

Dr. Marty Greer:

That's right. So you don't wait. I mean, a lot of people say, "Well, let's wait and watch it and see what it's going to do." I can tell you any lump your dog has, you wait and watch it, it's going to get bigger. The bigger it is, the more expensive it is to take it off, the harder it is on the patient for recovery, the harder it is for the surgery. It just doesn't make sense to wait and watch because I guarantee it's not going to go away.

Nick Rusch:

Right. This may sound odd too, but are certain... You mentioned the bigger the dog, the bigger the tumor, that only makes sense, I suppose, but are there certain breeds that are more likely to develop this?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. As a matter of fact there are, and in 2012, there was a really nice article published and you can find it on Google Scholar. You can't find it if you don't look a little hard, but in 2012, it was published at the International Symposium for Canine and Feline Reproduction. So not everybody goes to this meeting, I'm just going to say. It's a little specialized, but they did a really nice publication from Sweden that showed the incidence of mammary cancer by breed. Now, of course, it's Swedish dogs, but most of the time, the things that are going on in Sweden are happening in the rest of the breeds around the world. The reason they chose Sweden is because in the European countries, they don't routinely spay and neuter their pets. So we have a lot more dogs that are likely to develop breast cancer because the females aren't spayed, and because Sweden requires insurance for the pets, the dogs and cats. So they have a database that we don't have in the U.S.

Nick Rusch:

They have access to more information, then.

Dr. Marty Greer:

They do. In the U.S. almost all the dogs that we have information in a database are at Banfield hospitals, and those are all spayed and neutered pets, because those are in metropolitan areas where people aren't using those dogs for breeding. Now in our practice, we do a lot of canine reproduction and a little bit of feline reproduction, so we see a lot of dogs that haven't been spayed young. So we see a higher incidence of breast cancer than the average veterinary clinic, but still I'll tell you, I can count on one hand the number of dogs that have died from breast cancer. So it's a very low incidence for fatality, if we do early intervention. Cats, like I said, are a different story. They're 95% malignant, but dogs, they say, are 50% malignant but if you get in there early, take the lump off and you don't wait until it's the size of a softball...

Nick Rusch:

Your chances are much better.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Chances are really good that your dog is going to have a normal life expectancy without... Only if you intervene early. You don't want to wait.

Nick Rusch:

I don't want to put you on the spot. But when we mentioned that certain breeds do lean toward it a little more, can you share which breeds those are? Do you recall from the study?

Dr. Marty Greer:

I don't. I can tell you the pyometra part of that study, but the mammary cancer, I don't look at as seriously, because it doesn't really make a difference as far as early intervention goes. If you feel it, you take it off.

Nick Rusch:

No matter what breed you are.

Dr. Marty Greer:

So yes, you did put me on the spot, but I'll actually post the article on our Facebook page. Then if people are interested, they'll be able to take a look at it. So it'll be on the Pink Paw Facebook page.

Nick Rusch:

Regardless of breed, just check your dogs and cats. All right. Now, do we know the reasoning behind... Not reasoning behind, there's no... But do we know the reason that it's more likely for the cats to be malignant, more likely for the cats to die from it rather than the dogs?

Dr. Marty Greer:

We don't really know why. We see a much lower incidence in cats, but when they get it, it's almost always bad. Unfortunately, a lot of people don't notice it on their cats early, which kind of surprises me because they're in your lap and they're in your face and your hands are on them pretty often in most cases. But those cats the... Cats are not small dogs. We just have to keep remembering that cats get viral diseases dogs would never think of getting. So they just have a whole different sequence of diseases, and by knowing that I think it makes people a lot more aware that they do need to keep an eye on things. So pretty straight forward.

Nick Rusch:

Once again, it's kind of amazing, the correlation we see between animals and humans so often. I think we see more of it, not just because that we have access to more information, but it seems there's more information being shared. And that's a good thing. That's really a good thing.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It is. But dogs and cats have taken a different place in our lives than they were 50 years ago. 50 years ago, they were on the farm, they were outside. They weren't in the bed, they weren't on the couch. They weren't in the same places that our pets are now. So it really has made a big difference in how people look at their pets and of course, medicine has advanced significantly. Veterinary medicine is still a great bargain compared to what it would cost you to have anything done for yourself without insurance. Our veterinary costs are a fraction of what the human costs are, but I think it's just really important that we realize what an important role pets play in our lives.

Nick Rusch:

Are you seeing in the practice generally speaking, because of shows like this and because the more information available on the internet, that owners are a little bit better informed, and by and large, are taking better care of their pets?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Oh, for sure. And it's a rare experience in my exam room that someone comes in with a problem that they haven't already looked on Google and tried to find some information about. So yeah, it's definitely a much different demographic for a pet owner education that when we had 20 years ago, and I think that's great. I do think people need to be really careful what their sources of information are. That they look at universities, that they look at veterinary clinics, they look at manufacturer's websites. They don't go to the Facebook page for some of the diabetes support or whatever, because that can make them a little crazy. Some of the information that gets dispersed among client to client, isn't always as accurate as if you're using a veterinary website.

Nick Rusch:

I think that's true for any information on the internet.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Oh, absolutely.

Nick Rusch:

You've got to have a qualified source. You can't just... Otherwise it's just-

Dr. Marty Greer:

It's just noise.

Nick Rusch:

It's just chatter. I mean, it really isn't... I had a different word I was going to use then... But there again, there's a lot of information out there. There's a lot of disinformation out there. Your best source is probably your veterinarian.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right. Right. And we'll be posting a lot of information as the month rolls along on Pink Paw on breast cancer awareness. So if anyone has a question, has a concern, anything like that, please give us a call. Like I said, because of the number of dogs we see that aren't spayed and neutered in our practice, we have a pretty strong expertise in this area. So it's really great information, and we want to be that source for people. If they have a question, if they even want to... Just a website that they can use, that they know is reliable, we're happy to share that information because there are absolutely great sources and then not such great sources.

Nick Rusch:

Is there an age in a cat or a dog that this is most likely to occur?

Dr. Marty Greer:

That's a great question and the answer to that, is yes. It's usually over the age of eight and there's been a lot of discussion about, like I said, the age to spay and neuter. Although we're pushing people back and asking them to spay and neuter their dogs, especially large breed dogs, later than we used to, because we know we see some associated health benefits to waiting. We see less obesity, less incontinence, less thyroid disease, fewer allergies, less cancer. The three kinds of cancer we see less of are lymph node cancer (lymphoma), bone cancer (osteosarcoma), and spleen cancer (hemangiosarcoma). I think it's important that people know that even if they push back that age that we see very few dogs dying of breast cancer, but that doesn't mean that we don't have to pay attention to it. It just means that we don't see it as a cause of death frequently, even though it's a very common kind of cancer.

Nick Rusch:

With those parameters, is there an ideal age to spay and neuter your pet?

Dr. Marty Greer:

That's even a better question, and the answer to that, is we don't know right now. There's a lot of research going on. UC Davis, Dr. Benjamin Hart is doing a lot of publications. He's got 35 more breeds to publish. So far he's had German shepherds, Labradors, Golden Retrievers, and then there's a Vizsla study and a Rottweiler study. At this point, I'm going to say probably around four years of age, but that's sort of throwing a dart at the calendar because we don't exactly know yet. The research is-

Nick Rusch:

It's a very loose benchmark.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It is loose.

Nick Rusch:

Every dog is different. Every case is different, is that right?.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly, and different breeds are different. So things like pyometra, which is an infection in the uterus, we see that in 46% of Bernese mountain dogs. So if I had a Bernese mountain dog that I wasn't going to breed, I would think differently about spaying her than I would a miniature poodle who has a much lower risk. So again, that's the data that's out there and I'll post that onto our Facebook page so people can read it.

Nick Rusch:

But there again, the best resource is go to your veterinarian and you can discuss and figure out each individual case, when's the best time to get this done.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right. And a heat cycle is not right for every client, for every dog. The other alternative is, now we're leaving ovaries on our dogs. It's called an ovary sparing spay. So we leave the ovary and then they still have the hormonal benefits, but they don't have any risk of pyometra, which is an infection in the uterus, because there's no uterus and there's no risk of pregnancy because no uterus, no pregnancy. So for some dogs, for some clients, for some situations, it works really well. The doggy daycare places, they don't care for this because they still have to manage dog in heat behavior, which has both sides of the male and the female side to it. But from a health perspective, there's absolutely strong evidence that leaving at least one ovary can improve your dog's life expectancy. The larger the dog, the more likely that is to be the case.

Nick Rusch:

I want to just get your perspective on one bit of silliness that came over the Newswire this week. And maybe you heard about this, the guy who crossbred the Goldendoodle says he wished he hadn't done it, because there's so many other people doing crossbreeding now with the breeds that they shouldn't be doing it.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. Actually the Australian labradoodle, I think, is the one that you're referring to and it has, I think, five breeds in it. It's not just a lab bred to a poodle. We see a lot of the doodle breeds at this point in our practice, and a lot of other practices we're seeing it, and there's definitely some benefits to it, but it's still not a breed and it's still got a lot of inconsistencies. But there is a DNA test that you can determine what the coat will be like before you breed. If you know the parents' genetics, you can predict the coat. And the coat is important to a lot of people because it's low shedding and less likely to be an allergenic problem. So that's where, when I think the strongest argument for the doodle breeds has been, it's better for allergy patients.

Nick Rusch:

Ah, now see, that makes sense to me. Now, that's... at last we have some logic introduced into this discussion.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It is not a lot of logic in dog breeding, I'll just say.

Nick Rusch:

All right. Well, here's the main thing we want to pass along forward today. Check your pets and if you need information on how to do that and you need a great veterinarian to check with, to get all the information you need, Veterinary Village in Lomira, just give us your contact information.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Our phone is 920-269-4000. Our website is smallanimalclinic.com. Pretty easy, you can spell that. And our location is Highway 41 and 49 at the exit, just 12 miles South of Fond du Lac. It takes you less time to get there than it takes you to drive across Fond du Lac. So it's a quick trip and we're there seven days a week.

Nick Rusch:

Okay. Check your doggies and your kitties.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Thank you.

Nick Rusch:

Doc, it's always a pleasure, you know that?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Thanks.

Nick Rusch:

Go over to the practice, the doc would be the one in pink. She'll be easy to spot.