

Points on Pets: 'Blood hounds' circulate in small-animal hospitals

by R.G._Elmor_DVM

Q: After witnessing a horrible accident involving a dog hit by a car recently, I started to wonder if dogs are ever given blood transfusions. Unfortunately, the dog that I saw apparently lost a lot of blood and died before it could be taken to a veterinary hospital. I hope that I never witness such a tragedy again.

A: Many of the emergency procedures utilized today, including administering whole blood via transfusions, are very similar in both humans and animals. It has been estimated that more than a quarter million blood transfusions are given annually to dogs throughout the United States. Most veterinarians engaged in predominantly small-animal practices maintain colonies of healthy blood donor dogs. These dogs usually live within veterinary clinics or hospitals. These dogs have very good lives and are usually pampered by everyone working within the facility.

Several years ago the membership of the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine issued a blood transfusion statement regarding the screening of donated blood before using it for transfusions. This statement was developed to help veterinarians who collect, process and transfuse blood to know how to prevent accidental transmission of diseases during these procedures. Although the spread of diseases between dogs during the administration of blood transfusions has generally not been a problem, this statement was created to raise awareness and to encourage adherence to safe handling techniques.

A 30-pound dog can usually safely donate about one-third of a pint of blood during each donation. Donations can be made about every two weeks from most donors. Your veterinarian can give you additional information about how he or she obtains canine blood for transfusions. You might even be able to meet the donors at your veterinarian's clinic if you ask to do so.

Q: Is it possible to diagnose pregnancy in a horse by using an ultrasound machine? If so, can the fetus be seen? We think that our children's mare is pregnant. Since this is our first horse, we are pretty naive about what can be done diagnostically in mares.

A: The diagnosis of pregnancy in horses by using an ultrasound machine is very commonly done today. This procedure involves your veterinarian placing an ultrasound probe in the rectum of the mare directly over the uterus. The fetus, if present, can then be visualized on a small screen. The ultrasound technique for pregnancy diagnosis in horses is nearly 100 percent accurate at 15 days of pregnancy.

Approximately 10 percent of all mares known to be pregnant 30 to 40 days following breeding are not subsequently pregnant at 90 to 100 days. This is due to early embryonic death and reabsorption of the fetus. The reason that this occurs in any given mare is usually unknown. Because early embryonic death is so common in mares, it would be wise to have your veterinarian recheck your pregnant mare after 100 days of pregnancy.

Write to Pets, Copley News Service, P.O. Box 120190, San Diego, CA 92112-0190. Only questions of general interest will be answered in this column.

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