

# Prostate Cancer: The Hidden Killer

## "A Lesson Too Late for the Learning"

By Barbara Lee Williams

I would like to strongly urge all of you to have your veterinarian check the prostate glands of your German Shepherd males at your earliest convenience. Serious prostate problems can start with an enlarged prostate and, in some cases, progress into prostate cancer which can cause minor to severe urinary complications. It is particularly a problem in older stud dogs.

We know that prostate disease is very common in men, especially those 55 years of age or older. I believe the incidence is one in six men can expect to be affected by prostate cancer as they age. It is not as common in dogs, as far as it is known. Perhaps many cases have gone undetected and blamed on kidney failure, etc.

Unfortunately prostate disease often goes completely undetected in dogs. Some early signs sometimes can be observed, such as straining to urinate, often with a small urine stream that may stop and start. In other words it isn't a normal full stream with a constant flow of urine. Sometimes the color of the urine can be very light, almost clear, which is an indication the kidneys are failing. Or it can be very coffee-brown dark, sometimes with a bloody urine discharge. Some dogs will stand a bit hunched up over the loin, or show some discomfort upon being palpated. Some will exhibit fullness above the abdomen, which indicates the bladder is not being fully emptied upon urination. If any of these signs are apparent, get to your vet ASAP, as they can be life-threatening, if not treated.

Some dogs show no symptoms, until it is too late and too much damage already has been done. I would never have known my Nero had any problems at all if I hadn't taken him to ICSB to have his sperm collected again.

The sperm collection showed a large amount of blood and inflammation in it. We all were shocked. I went straight to our regular vet's office and they examined him. This is done manually, by inserting a finger into the rectum and palpating the prostate gland itself, feeling for any abnormality or enlargement. Nero withstood this exam quietly, although it is painful.

Our vet found Nero's prostate gland was enlarged and she felt a suspicious lump as well. We discussed our options: neuter him and hope for the best, or treat him and re-examine him on a weekly basis. I didn't want to put him out, which would be necessary if he were to be neutered. One reason was that I have a particularly terrible dread of anesthesia, plus there can be bleeding and/or infection afterwards as no surgery is without risk

Nero appeared to be in otherwise excellent health and had always been a very physically strong and healthy boy, so we treated him with the maximum dose (two capsules daily) of Baytril for eight long weeks, and had his veterinarian check him every week. He was always good about it, even though he knew what was coming his way when we entered the vet's door. But he knew we all were trying to help him, and he stoically tolerated the weekly exams. It is important that you always have the same veterinarian do the exam, as he or she will know what is normal or abnormal for your particular dog's prostate gland size and shape.

The lump appeared to have gone down and the size of the prostate gland also had decreased. Nero was not experiencing any problems with urination. He maintained his 90 pounds and glossy coat and appeared to be in great shape. We were very happy and relieved. All seemed to be going well on our side in this fight. We felt great relief at having dodged a big bullet, or so we thought.

The painful vet exams were extended now to once every month. He was almost 10 years old when once again he began to show signs of frequent urination with a small, stop and start stream. Then the bladder would not fully empty. Nero went back on the antibiotics, but this time to no avail.

So I would like to caution all of you to have regular checks performed on your males, and, as a precaution, neuter those you do not intend to breed. We did not want to put our Nero boy through chemotherapy, so we just went day by day. It is still too terribly painful to recall all the details. But I would like to strongly suggest to all of you to have this testing done and watch for any signs of urinary discomfort or problems.

Just as important-- please do not accept anyone's word, even from your closest friends, that a bitch brought to your stud dog has been tested for mycoplasma and the other sexually-transmitted diseases. Our veterinarian believes this was the beginning of Nero's problems -- being infected with Mycoplasma from a natural breeding. Fortunately we had frozen semen stored prior to the infection.

So for the welfare and well-being of your stud dogs, do not take anyone's word that their bitch has been cleared of STDs. Insist that you see a certificate from the veterinarian and call the vet yourself to confirm. Mycoplasma can cause sterility in the male and can bring on inflammation of the prostate and urinary problems.

It takes 21 days to get the results of a mycoplasma test, so the test has to be performed prior to the bitch coming in season. Don't let it be 'a lesson too late for the learning' for your stud dog. ■

