SHORT COMMUNICATION

Variation in the management of congestive cardiac failure in dogs

T. Davies, S. Everitt, M. Cobb

Context
Veterinarians presented with a canine patient with congestive cardiac failure (CCF) have a wide range of therapeutic options to choose from. The aim of this study was to investigate decisions made about the management of CCF caused by both canine degenerative valve disease (CDVD) and dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM) in dogs in the UK.

Main conclusion
This study has demonstrated that variation exists in the management of heart failure in general veterinary practice in the UK.

Approach
A total of 604 questionnaires were sent to 301 veterinary practices in the UK. The questionnaire was written in the style of clinical vignettes, two short clinical cases describing dogs with CCF, one on each page; the first case (case 1) was based on a dog with CDVD, the second (case 2) a dog with DCM. Identical questions were asked about the management of each case.

Results
Sixty-five of 604 questionnaires were returned (11 per cent), of these, nine could not be analysed; 56 questionnaires were therefore analysed.

Ten combinations of drugs were recommended for case 1, the most common being furosemide, pimobendan and benazepril, and more than 10 combinations for case 2, the most common being furosemide, pimobendan and digoxin. Ten additional management options were suggested in total, the most common being changes to exercise regime. Nine additional investigations were suggested, the most common being blood sampling, although this was recommended by a maximum of 33 per cent of respondents. Thirty-seven vets (66 per cent) would see case 1 within seven days, 34 vets (61 per cent) would see case 2 within seven days and six vets said they would hospitalise case 2 at presentation.

Interpretation
Despite considerable reliable published evidence supporting the use of many of the agents, and recently published guidelines on the management of CCF due to CDVD, profound variation exists in the management of canine heart failure in general veterinary practice in the UK.

Significance of findings
Given the variation identified in this study, future research is required to investigate why this is the case and, importantly, what the impact of this variation in approach might have on patient survival.
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