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Kidney Disease

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W.H.W.T.C.A. Health Committee

Description: It is important to draw a distinction between renal (kidney) disease and renal failure. Renal disease represents any degree of structural or functional abnormality in the kidney. It may be mild and self-limiting or may be extensive and progressive, resulting in kidney failure. Renal failure refers to the complex symptomatology of multiple organ malfunction, which is attributed to some forms of kidney disease.

Clinical Signs: There are no unique clinical signs that can distinguish renal failure associated with hereditary disease from renal failure associated with a variety of other causes. Dogs usually have a rapid onset if clinical signs even though the disease may have been present for quite some time. Owners report loss of appetite, polyuria, polydipsia, depression, malaise, vomiting and diarrhea. Physical exam may reveal fetid breath, ulcers on the gums and tongue, anemia, dehydration and stunted growth and loose teeth in immature dogs.

Diagnosis: A complete blood count (CBC) and chemistry profile is recommended. Aside from the clinical chemistry findings, a urinalysis will provide valuable information for diagnosing chronic renal failure. Radiographs are also useful for examining the size and shape of the kidneys. A needle biopsy of the kidney is recommended early in the course of the disease to determine the extent of renal disease and to monitor the progression of the disease.

Treatment: Treatment is generally palliative and directed toward alleviating the signs of renal failure.

Mode of Inheritance: Hereditary kidney diseases have been recognized in many breeds of dogs and are significant causes of renal failure in young dogs. A wide diversity of structural and or functional defects accounts for the clinicopathological entities. The mode of inheritance has been defined incompletely and is currently in research. Recognition of the disorder and proper breeding management are the only means of eliminating the genetic trait in the canine population.

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