

CONNIE – HER STORY

Ectopic Ureter – and a way forward

Connie was born on the 13th March 2016, with four brothers and three sisters. All eight thrived and were much loved by Sylvie, their mum. I started my normal routine of weighing each puppy once a day and checking that all was well and that none were “wet”, with urine stains on their back legs or tails. My heart sank at day 20 when for the first time I noticed one was indeed showing these signs. I put a little collar on her and watched her for a few days. She continued to be damp, and if I laid her on her back I could see beads of urine leaking from her vulva.



My first port of call was Margaret Woods (Breed Health Co-Ordinator). She put me in touch with Laura Owen at the University of Cambridge, The Queens Veterinary School Hospital. I wrote to Laura and told her about Connie. She was extremely kind and helpful and explained about the new procedure to try to correct ectopic ureters. She booked Connie in to be seen and operated on at 14 weeks.

Now I had to get Connie to that age. With urine leaking 24/7 puppies soon become scalded and raw. Laura told me about a new spray called Cavilon and I bought several bottles of it from Amazon. At the same time I invested in puppy nappies of different sizes and types until we found the one that suited us best. To begin with she needed “small”, we progressed to “medium”, and then to “large”. They were easy to put on and absorbed a lot of liquid. Once a day Connie’s tummy and legs were thoroughly washed and dried, something she soon got used to. I used



an Aloe Vera shampoo which I felt would be kindest to her skin. Once dry we would turn her on her back, so her back legs flopped out, and then sprayed the whole tummy and inside of her legs with the Cavilon spray. It only needs 30 seconds or so to dry, and gave a robust waterproof coating to her skin which kept it from breaking down. Once dry she would rejoin the litter without a backward glance. When sleeping I would pop a puppy nappy on her and that helped soak up the leaking. To begin with I also put a nappy on her at night. Sometimes she was still wearing it in the morning, sometimes her siblings removed it before I did! However, two nights running she poo’d in it and that gave her horrendous nappy rash – so I decided that I had to be around to take it off her as soon as she woke, and so the night time nappy had to be discontinued. However, even only wearing a nappy during sleep times in the day all helped to keep her skin from becoming infected and she didn’t seem to mind them at all.



Connie saw my own vet who put her on a short course of anti-biotics and also took urine samples direct from the bladder to check that all was well with her kidneys. She didn’t seem to mind this procedure at all and would happily trot off with him, to be cuddled by a nurse while the sample was taken. He liaised with Laura about her results and agreed to put her on a second course of anti-biotics 10 days before her operation.

On the 15th June we made the trip to Cambridge. As feared she had bilateral ectopic ureters, both of which emptied into the urethra. A “laser ablation” procedure was carried out so that Connie’s ureters both now insert into the bladder – in other words she should no longer leak. The work is carried out internally and so there are no incisions or stitches – and they take a film of the procedure for future reference. They also collected DNA samples from Connie. We collected a rather sleepy Connie at 6 that evening and brought her home. She seemed none the worse for her day and once home did a huge piddle with a full bladder for the first time in her life.



Laura warned me that Connie might continue to leak slightly for a while, which she did, but nothing like it had been. In September Connie had her first season, and as expected, once that had finished the leaking stopped completely and she is now entirely dry. I am also delighted to report that Connie has a new home with Lesley Kelsey, Stori and Brooke where she is much loved. A perfect ending to a rather anxious start.

And so, I hear you ask, what was the cost? The major outlay obviously was for the procedure at Cambridge and I was asked to pay £238.80 when we arrived to see Laura and I was billed for the balance of £1365.89 at the end of July – £1604.69 in total. Add to that the cost of the sprays, the nappies, the anti-biotics and my own vet’s charges and that probably amounted about £400. So, for about £2,000, Connie now has the chance to lead a life to the full. I was more than happy to pay this to save her. I had the money from the sale of her siblings and I truly felt this was money well spent.

This is the one condition more than any other that costs little girl puppies their lives. It is tragic that so many puppies have died because of a simple fault with their “plumbing”. Now that this procedure is available I truly hope that many more breeders like me will take this route and not just put to sleep so many innocent babies.

If I may I am now going to quote Margaret Woods who wrote on my Facebook timeline.....

“I am confident that the Animal Health Trust and Cambridge University are working with our breed, for the good of our breed, and with me, as Breed Health Co ordinator for our breed. All UK Golden Retriever Breed Clubs have some input to these projects. The AHT and Cambridge University have access to funding and our Breed Clubs through Council can also contribute. No doubt there will be a commercial aspect to consider for whoever eventually can offer a DNA test, but that is not our objective. A DNA test may be light years away. I believe it is a very complex mode of inheritance and as far as I am aware there is not a DNA test offered anywhere by ANY organisation that is for a multi gene condition.

The fantastic project with Cambridge is to offer non invasive diagnostic ultra sound testing in addition to non invasive non surgical correction of EU using laser treatment.

Ectopic Ureter affects males as well as females, but the males remain undetected for many years. Often it is only in middle age that an affected male will start "dribbling" or wetting his bed at night. Can you imagine what effect THAT will have on our breed if that particular male is a popular stud dog? I know there are many breeders over the years who have kept litter brothers and sisters from EU affected puppies. I don't have a problem with this, but our gene pool is now saturated with mutant genes and it is like Russian Roulette when breeding. The Cambridge University project is so important in that it offers a way forward, until a DNA test is available.”

The call is now going out for healthy dogs to come forward for screening. Cambridge University are looking for healthy, urinary continent Golden Retrievers of both sexes to take part in ultrasound screening and DNA testing. More importantly, if any breeder has a wet puppy and would like to contribute to this research, it is MOST IMPORTANT that the correct procedure is followed as soon as the condition is identified in any puppy. I plan to offer Connie's mother and siblings to be included in this study. It is so important that we all contribute to this worthy cause and having dogs that are deemed to be clear of this problem can only be a good thing. Please contact Margaret Woods for more information. margaret.woods6@btinternet.com or 01388 835112.

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