A potential champ? [distemper in dogs]

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A POTENTIAL CHAMP?

By F. C. WILKINSON, B.V.Sc., Veterinary Surgeon

THE mother of this pup was an eight-year-old sheep dog and in the eyes of her owner she was a champion and well worth her keep. She was perhaps slowing down a little, so the best looking pup out of the last litter had been kept as a possible replacement.

This pup was called Trixie, and had enjoyed normal health, but now she was a sick dog.

History
Just a week before, Trixie, for the first time, had refused her evening meal and was unusually quiet. Two days later she had still not eaten and could not be tempted with minced liver or egg flips. Her nose was dry, and a yellowish discharge had appeared between the eyelids and had tended to gum them together. A similar discharge was also apparent from the nose and the dog had developed a bad cough.

The owner thought Trixie might have a cold and blamed himself for allowing the pup to ride in the back of the utility on a wet, cold day about a week before. But thinking back, he remembered that the dog at the farm he visited had not looked well, and it had been playing with Trixie.

Could Trixie have contracted some infection? He was going into town that day so he took her to the veterinary hospital.

Diagnosis
The veterinarian gave a grave shake of the head when Trixie was presented. He immediately recognised the familiar signs of distemper. He had seen three similar cases that day, and there was obviously an epidemic in the district.

An examination revealed severe pneumonia and tonsillitis. Worse still, Trixie had the "shakes"—an involuntary twitching of the muscles as if shivering, and the earliest sign of damage to the nervous system.

Action
The veterinarian explained that he could give treatment to overcome the secondary bacterial infection causing the pneumonia and tonsillitis but there was little he could do to stop the virus damage to the nervous system, and, in fact, more serious nervous damage could still occur.

The owner decided to try treatment, so went home armed with medicine to administer as instructed.
Result
Trixie's health picked up for a few days. There was less eye discharge and coughing almost ceased. She still would not eat but did swallow gruels when spoonfed. However, the twitching became worse so that she could hardly walk.
A week later the course of treatment was completed. Trixie could no longer stand so she was taken back to the veterinary hospital where, upon professional advice, she was painlessly destroyed.

Trixie's owner enquired how his neighbour's dog had fared. It had been luckier in some respects in that it had lived, but had a permanent twitching.
Trixie's mother now has another litter of two pups. About two weeks after weaning the owner intends to take them in to the veterinary hospital for a single shot of vaccine which will immunise them against distemper and prevent a similar fate to Trixie's.
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