ADDISON'S DISEASE IN THE PORTUGUESE WATER DOG

One Copy for the Owner ___
One Copy for the Dog's File at the Vet's Office ___

Over the past several months no fewer than 4 veterinarians in different states, diagnosed Portuguese Water Dogs with ACUTE KIDNEY FAILURE. These dogs were, in fact, ADDISONIAN. All of these dogs would have died if the breeders had not INSISTED that the dogs be tested for Addison's disease. ALL four of these dogs are alive and well because their breeders acted quickly and thoughtfully.

All owners of Portuguese Water Dogs should let veterinarians know that our breed has a genetic predisposition to Addison's disease. We are, therefore, much more likely to experience Addison's disease than other breeds. It also means that Addison's should always be a considered diagnosis when a dog is suddenly ill with vomiting, diarrhea, lethargy or dehydration and there is no apparent reason. In short, testing for Addison's disease should be part of the diagnostic process with any really sick dog when the cause of the illness is not clear. Addison's is a disease that can affect dogs of any age (our youngest to date is 8 months and the eldest is 10 years) but mostly it is found in dogs and bitches from 15 to 48 months. Many veterinarians just don't think about Addison's disease as a possible diagnosis because it is unusual in their experience, while kidney failure is much more prevalent.

Veterinarians who know our breed and have diagnosed Addisonians follow a specific diagnostic process. For example, a blood panel is drawn and the sodium/potassium RATIO is carefully reviewed. If the sodium/potassium ratio is less than 27, the dog is most likely Addisonian. This is not the case with Kidney failure. Most frequently the sodium/potassium ration IS normal with kidney failure. This is a simple difference that may well provide the basis for correct diagnosis.

Many Addisonians show an elevated white blood cell count as well, which is frequently assumed to be an infection and therefore Addison's is not pursued as a diagnosis. And there may be other signs that don't suggest textbook Addison's as well.
To confirm Addison's disease, an ACTH stimulation test should be performed immediately.

If the dog is very sick and seriously dehydrated, IV fluids are critical to save the dog's life. BUT before starting other medical treatment an ACTH test should be performed to clearly diagnosis Addison's disease. If the dog is put on steroids (prednisone) first, the ACTH test will not be accurate.

So if the dog is given prednisone or another cortisone drug, you must wait at least 10 days after the course of therapy to administer an ACTH test. Several veterinarians consulted suggest that INSTEAD OF USING PREDNISONE, the drug Dexamathazone can be used, in which case, an ACTH test with accurate results can be done immediately and the dog, if Addisonian, can be treated properly far more quickly.

It is suggested that you provide this information to your veterinarian NOW. It could mean that someday in a crisis situation you would actually save the life of your dog.