

The Standard Schnauzer Health Survey: “What Next”

Dr. H. Mohrenweiser, Health Survey 2008 Taskforce Chair

As we bring the 2008 health survey to closure, it is important to think about “the future”.

The collection and analysis of the survey data is only a beginning. The more important goal of a health survey is to develop a better understanding of and to address conditions/diseases identified in the survey, leading to improvements in the health of all Standard Schnauzers and maintenance of the gene pool that is the future of the breed.

To accomplish this, we are currently attempting to:

1. Identify all dogs with any of the six diseases listed below, including dogs not enrolled in the 2008 health survey;
2. Collect complete data and inventory resources for each dog affected with one of these diseases.

This is critical for initiation of research programs and/or to provide recommendations regarding husbandry practices.

These diseases /conditions, even though they occur in only a very small number of our dogs, are the focus of follow-up activities. With so few dogs affected, identifying each dog is critical.

1. Dilative Cardiomyopathy (DCM): Follow-up is necessary to address questions such as (a) do the cases in different litters exhibit the same pathology; (b) do the available data suggest a genetic basis for the disease or is this possibly a developmental condition caused by exposure to toxins during pregnancy or in the neonatal period or some husbandry practices. These questions are important as multiple forms of DCM occur in some breeds and although DCM is clearly genetic in some breeds, this is not so clear for DCM in some other breeds.

2. Liver Cancer: A number of cases of liver cancer were reported in “middle” age dogs. In humans, (non-metastatic) liver cancer is clearly an exposure (moldy grain, hepatitis virus) driven disease. Questions include: Was there a common exposure for these dogs? Do we have a potential genetic condition?

3. Persistent Hyaloid Artery (PHA): This developmental anomaly of the eye was noted in several dogs. The hyaloid vessels have usually regressed at birth. Is PHA an issue in our breed or were these isolated cases?

4. Torn Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL): Cases of torn ACLs were reported for a number of dogs. What were the conditions where these injuries occurred? Are there issues we need to be concerned about in our breeding programs or in our husbandry of our dogs?

5. Epilepsy: The few cases of epilepsy in Standard Schnauzers have been characterized by recurrent seizures beginning at a young (less than 2 years) age. There is a wide variety of seizure patterns, with the typical pattern being grand mal (whole body) seizures. There are more males affected than females. There is no diagnostic test for epilepsy, thus diagnosis is based on elimination of other possible causes. All epileptics have seizures but not all seizures are caused by epilepsy. A single seizure in a young dog or seizures in an older dog are probably not epilepsy.

6. Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA): Unlike PRA in most other breeds, the few cases of PRA reported in Standard Schnauzers were diagnosed in older dogs, 6-9 years of age. One of the concerns is that, because this condition has a late age-at-onset in Standard Schnauzers, the diagnosis might be missed. That is, the decreased visual acuity might be assumed to be caused by cataracts or simply “old-age”. This diagnosis requires an exam by a trained ophthalmologist.

What is needed as we move forward to address questions regarding these diseases/conditions?

Given the small number of dogs with any of these diseases/conditions, it is very critical that (1) all dogs with these conditions be identified, and (2) that we collect all available data regarding each dog – history of condition, relatives affected, tissue pathology, test results, samples currently available, etc. The critical information is not always obvious, thus, data gathering will require dialog to insure that the appropriate questions are asked. This will let us develop a better understanding of these diseases in Standard Schnauzers. It could also let us partner in research programs with breeds with diseases that are most similar to the disease in Standard Schnauzers. This could assist in development of tests to make sure that these diseases **DO NOT** become major problems for Standard Schnauzers.

To insure a healthy future for this breed that is so important to us, we must continue to address these potential health issues. Thus I ask (yes, I will beg) that owners/breeders of dogs with the above conditions (even if you did not participate in the health survey) contact me at mohrenweiser@wvi.com to establish communication and engage in scientific discussion.

When owners/breeders contact me and provide information, all information will be considered confidential. Further steps to study these diseases will be considered only after discussion with individuals providing information; we **can** make progress while insuring that individual dogs and the owners/breeders are not identified.

It is CRITICAL to understand that every dog and every bit of information is very important as we strive to understand these diseases/conditions and take the necessary steps to protect the future health of our breed. I look forward to working with you.



A MUSTARD

*We have done good, BUT
WE NEED TO DO EVEN BETTER.*