Happy Spring to our referring veterinarian community! Since the trees will soon be blooming and the flowers blossoming, I suspect the humans amongst us will be sneezing and sniffling…but what do we do when canine patients come to us with nasal discharge that doesn’t resolve on its own after a few days?

In young animals, nasal discharge may be caused by nasal foreign bodies or allergic rhinitis. We commonly diagnose neoplasia and fungal rhinitis as well, especially in older dolichocephalic dogs. When first line treatments such as Benadryl and antibiotics don’t lead to improvement, referral to a specialist should be recommended.

I consider the color and laterality of the discharge to be very important in narrowing down my differential list and what diagnostics should be performed.

Bloody, bilateral nasal discharge can be seen with thrombocytopenia and coagluathpies as well as hypertension and vasculitis, so obtaining a complete blood cell count, chemistry panel, clotting profile, blood pressure and tick-borne disease screening is imperative. In older dogs, bloody bilateral nasal discharge often signifies an underlying neoplasia. Unilateral bloody, green or mucoid nasal discharge, or bilateral mucoid or green discharge may indicate a foreign body, neoplasia or fungal granuloma.

Definitive diagnosis often requires advanced imaging in the form of a CT or MRI accompanied by endoscopy. We employ CT scanning here at SEVO-Med to analyze the skull and nasal cavities, because radiographs of the skull and nasal cavity are often non-diagnostic due to the overlay of small bony turbinates and facial bones. Rhinoscopic exam (retrograde and antegrade – the latter in large dogs) is then used to visualize the mucosa and identify masses or fungal plaques. Of course, histopathology is needed for definitive diagnosis of cell type and to (hopefully!) identify any fungal organisms. Since histopathology and culture are low-yield tests for fungal rhinitis, I use visualization of plaques on endoscopic exam as well as a positive fungal titer (Aspergillosis) to support the diagnosis.

Take the case of Opus, a very handsome Golden Retriever (with a long nose and history of being outdoors) who made his way to SEVO-Med when his owners noticed an odor to his nose as well as green-tinged pinkish nasal discharge from his right nostril. Antibiotics temporarily offered partial improvement. After CT scan identified erosion of nasal turbinate bones and soft tissue opacity with an irregular pattern of growth within the nasal cavities and rhinoscopy identified fungal disease, we treated Opus with two Clotrimazole infusions, three months apart. This has been the most effective treatment to date for nasal aspergillosis. The treatments are more effective if the plaques can be visualized and removed via rhinoscopy. Clinical success rates for cure of nasal aspergillosis reported previously for clotrimazole infusion were 65% with one treatment and 87% with multiple treatments. It is important to note that the cribriform plate was intact on Opus’ CT scan. If it had not been, a Clotrimazole infusion would have introduced a risk of death if the caustic agent had infiltrated into the nervous tissue. This is why a CT scan is so important prior to definitive therapy. Although this disease can be very frustrating to treat and many dogs need four or more treatments, we are happy to say that he is doing well at home with alleviation of clinical signs. Oral anti-fungal agents can be used but are less successful than topical treatments of Clotrimazole.

So the next time you have a challenging case of a persistently snotty nose, you’ll know that our internal medicine team would be happy to see your client!

Abigail Bertalan
VMD, DACVIM (Internal medicine)

References, listed on reverse side of page.
Southeast Veterinary Oncology and Internal Medicine is now offering a CPR continuing education course to our local veterinary community. Our presenter is our Internal Medicine Lead Nurse, Sara Atkinson. She is CPR certified through the American College of Veterinary Emergency and Critical Care. The CPR training course is a fun interactive class that covers all aspects of canine and feline CPR. It highlights prevention and preparedness, team communication and roles, basic life support, advanced life support, and team debriefing.

Please feel free to contact Sara Atkinson at 904.567.7519 to set a class up for your clinic today!

We want to thank First Coast Veterinary Specialists and First Coast Veterinary Emergency for having us host a course at their location! What a talented team!