



Interesting Case from our web site www.fairfield-vets.co.uk



"Ellie" - Golden Retriever with Ascites



Ellie

Ellie, a 5 year old Golden Retriever, was brought in to see my colleague, Terry Dunne, when her owners noticed she had a swollen abdomen and was weak and lethargic. Terry performed an ultrasound scan and quickly ascertained that Ellie's abdomen was full of fluid – a condition called ascites. At this point he asked me to take over Ellie's case as this sort of problem was more my area of expertise.

Fluid in the abdomen can be caused by a huge range of diseases, from cancer to liver disease to bowel disease to heart disease. In these situations we need to narrow down the list of possibilities, both by preliminary tests, but also – importantly – by a thorough examination of the patient.

We have recently had a veterinary student – Mark Short, from Barwell – seeing practice with us. Whilst he was here, I emphasized to him the importance of a thorough examination, telling him "You miss more by not looking than not knowing".

In Ellie's case, it was my "hands on" examination which led to a diagnosis. When I listened to her chest, it was very difficult to hear her heart. This was because she had a condition called a pericardial effusion.

The pericardium is a sac around the heart. In this condition, the sac fills with fluid. Because there is no exit for the fluid, it starts to compress the heart as it accumulates, leading to heart failure, hence the fluid in Ellie's abdomen. We confirmed this condition by doing another ultrasound scan – this time of the heart. Ellie was then sent as an emergency to see a heart specialist in Kenilworth, who drained a pint of fluid from the pericardial sac.

In Golden Retrievers, this condition can happen spontaneously, with no obvious underlying cause. The good news is that in 60% of them, it doesn't recur. In the 40% where the fluid does come back, open chest surgery is needed to remove the sac from around the heart so that fluid can no longer build up and compress it.

Within a week, Ellie was 6Kg lighter, as the fluid in her abdomen disappeared. Her waistline returned to its usual trim shape. Unfortunately, Mr Dunstan's wallet was also considerably lighter – her treatment totaled £1250! Fortunately, Ellie was insured.

Mr Dunstan was meant to be playing golf on the day he had to rush Ellie to the specialist. That would have only cost him £10!

Geraldine Young BVSc CertSAM MRCVS.

This article is available on the Fairfield Veterinary Centre web site at www.fairfield-vets.co.uk

You won't care how much we know - until you know how much we care