Health Testing

(as printed in AKC Gazette, Dec 2001 Miniature Pinscher Breed Column, courtesy of: Faith Gordon)

This month's column was written by Judy Peters, of Grand Rapids, MI

Several years ago my husband and I fell in love with the Min Pin and decided to add this delightful breed to our household. We read everything we could get our hands on, watched the breed at shows and talked to breeders. We located a breeder and purchased a puppy. The breeder had shown and finished several dogs and showed us impressive pedigrees on the puppies we looked at. I was very interested in health conditions associated with the Min Pin and asked what problems I should look for. I was totally surprised to be told that there were no problems in "well-bred show prospects." I thought this was somewhat strange, as I had read about potential problems in the breed — and know there can be health problems with any breed.

Now, years later, I know all too well what problems exist and how we can lessen their occurrence and try to eliminate them.

How can breeders work toward ensuring that we produce the healthiest possible puppy? The answer is simple: by testing the parents before they are bred, to prove we have done everything scientifically possible to produce the best puppy possible. Paying for tests before breeding is certainly cheaper than paying medical costs, legal fees and reimbursements if the puppies we sell suffer from genetic illnesses.

One test breeders should do is to OFA the hips to look for problems such as hip dysplasia. X-rays are submitted to OFA and are evaluated by a panel of veterinarian radiologists who grade the hips from excellent to severely dysplastic. The radiologists are also able to identify other radiographic findings, such as a transitional vertebra and spondylosis, both of which could have familial, inherited causes. This evaluation can be done on or after the dog's second birthday.

OFA also provides a registry for patellar luxation. This requires a simple evaluation performed by your own vet after the dog's first birthday. Findings can range from normal to medial luxation, which can be found in toy, miniature and large breeds; lateral luxation, which can be found in toy, miniature and large breeds; and luxation resulting from trauma, which can be found in various breeds. While the luxation may not be present at birth, the anatomical deformities that cause these luxations are present at that time. Medial luxation is far more common and generally found in younger dogs, and it is believed to be inherited. Lateral luxation is generally found in older dogs. It is not known if it can be inherited.

Testing should also be considered for elbow dysplasia, which is an inherited polygenic disease. This again requires X-rays, which are submitted to OFA. Breeders can also test for thyroid function and should not overlook testing for a CERF evaluation, which identifies eye diseases.

Of course, just performing these evaluations on your breeding stock will not prevent genetic disorders in future litters. But by consistently and honestly evaluating all breeding animals, we can begin to eliminate the genetic problems that plague our beloved breed. — J.P.

Thanks, Judy. — Faith K Gordon