

Minutes of the First Ordinary Meeting

Held on Thursday 3rd November 2016

'One Health and Dog Bites – How Medical and Vets Can Work Together'

Mr Christopher Mannion, Oral & Maxillofacial Consultant, Leeds Teaching Hospitals, and Miss Danielle Greenberg, Veterinary Surgeon, Liverpool



Left to right: Miss Danielle Greenberg, Mr Derek Machin and Mr Christopher Mannion

The President introduced the two speakers, Mr Chris Mannion, Maxillofacial Surgeon, with a particular interest in facial reconstruction from Leeds, and Danielle Greenberg, Vet in General Practice for twenty years in Liverpool. Both had developed an interest in dog bite, initially entirely independently, but subsequently the common interest had enabled them to work together. The President also welcomed the extensive representation from the Veterinary fraternity and pointed out to them that they could join the Liverpool Medical Institution as Associate Members.

Mr Chris Mannion now worked as a Maxillofacial Surgeon though he had come to this with some background in trauma. His initial work in the field of dog bites found that in two district general hospitals, three times as many dog bites occurred in the less than 10 year old age group as in the 11-50 age group. One third of injuries occurred when the dog's owner was present, two thirds when the dog was alone without the owner nearby. The incidence of dog bites appeared to be three times higher in the most deprived social areas. Many injuries occurred when intervening in a dog fight, extremities were the most frequent bitten areas. Injuries came in many types, punctures from the dog's canine teeth, tears and crushing injuries from its molar teeth. Head and neck injuries usually healed well, the areas involved having a good blood supply, with a low incidence of infection. Combined puncture and crush injuries could cause some concern. Treatment generally was aimed at debridement and primary closure where possible. Reconstruction if necessary could be carried out as a later procedure.

Mr Mannion illustrated various reconstructive techniques in a group of 64 patients. He reflected that the multifaceted causes of the injury require a multifaceted management approach beyond the simple repair of the injury. Overall it was a requirement to address not only the patient but the social side of the patient's life and the dog's life. In his series of 65 patients, 21 had been bitten by their own dog. Review of the social aspects revealed that in this series, 28% of the dogs had a history of biting previously. In a significant proportion, alcohol and occasionally drugs were involved with the dog's owner or supervisor. Of the children in the series, 8 were unsupervised and 10 were supervised at the time. 17% of the dogs involved had gone on to be put down. Bull Terriers, Collies and Spaniels appeared to be the worst offenders in his short series. He reflected that co-operation

between the medical, veterinary, social services and general practice was required in order to make any headway with prevention.

Danielle Greenberg was a Liverpool Vet in general practice for 20 years and had developed a local and personal interest in dog bites. She reflected that a dog could be a family member, a fashion accessory, for protection or a status symbol, but overall humans including children intrude into the dog's world whatever the position of the dog. 24% of dogs appeared to be conducted on less than one walk a week, 60% of dogs had no formal training and many owners felt it was perfectly satisfactory to leave the dog alone for long periods. In Liverpool, one child a day is admitted to hospital with a dog bite, as indeed is one postman.

Most dog bites occur between 3pm and 7pm and there was another peak between 10pm and 11pm with an increase in school holidays. Causes were legion, insurers report that Labradors and Bull Terriers are the worst offenders but small dogs often inflict small bites which are not reported. About half appear to have bitten before. The circumstances of the bite are variable but most have had no recent exercise and no formal training. A dog is often awoken from sleep or interrupted in feeding, rough playing, running and shouting. Vets are in a good position to help with this but at present are largely firefighting and major education campaign becomes a public health issue. There is no veterinary student teaching of dog behaviour or warning signs and little advice appears to come from veterinary practices on avoidance of aggressive behaviour, the need for training and to socialise dogs.

Miss Greenberg's practice, however, had been able to embark with good cooperation from the Liverpool Police, educational advice for schools focussing on the responsibility involved when looking after pets, focussing mostly on dogs. This had come of a very satisfactory cooperation between the veterinary fraternity, police, A & E specialists who sadly may be involved with repair, epidemiologists and also with cooperation from the PDSA. A Merseyside Dog Safety Partnership had grown from this and there was hope that the local programme would be rolled out nationally. The programme focussed on respect for the dog's personal space and environment, proper training in discipline, the need for adequate exercise and the socialisation of the dog with both other dogs and human beings. Miss Greenberg went on to answer questions commenting that the police only identify dog types for the formal list but many are cross types and it becomes difficult to know what type is more or less dangerous.

Delivery of the programme probably needed more focussed targeting but it was becoming apparent that the most needy target groups were the least cooperative, particularly over vaccinations and training etc. Involvement of breeders was proving difficult. Many work under the radar at home and are not registered. Miss Greenberg concluded by reflecting that it was probably going to be more effective to look at society and not the dogs, but the need to give a dog a safe place to call its own, where it should be properly fed, trained and exercised, and not teased or exposed to aggressive behaviour. She said that many owners were grateful for advice and not at all resentful but this group may not be the primary group requiring targeting. She was pleased that the programme had made a good start, it may not fix everything, but some good progress had been made.

A vote of thanks was given by Dr Susan Evans who congratulated Miss Greenberg on her programme and how it had achieved such good cooperation between lay and professional and hoped that education could continue.

Roger Franks