

A MATTER OF CHOICE

By Pam Paloma

My first experience with seizures was while working at a summer camp for disabled kids. I wonder why, as a teenager, I was not as horrified at seeing a human throw himself around as I am today watching a Wolfhound in the same process? Actually, my second Wolfhound had seizures but she was 10 ½ years old when they started and they were infrequent as well as mild. We would just put a blanket over her to make sure she didn't chill as she woke up.

Almost 30 years later I was awakened by a favorite young dog. I thought he had caught his legs under the bed while dreaming. As I pulled him away from the bed, he stood and began crashing around the room. Finally, he slept and I lay in bed making mental excuses. He just had all his shots; he'd had an airplane ride and been to a show; we were in a strange house etc.etc. My heart knew that this was the beginning of the end for a dog I cherished. Twice more that day he had grand mal cluster seizures. Needless to say, he was exhausted. He was barely a year old then.

Almost two years later another dog, at four and a half years of age, had his first seizure. Because of his age, I had thought he was safe. We did not use medication with this dog as he went months without another occurrence. We kept him in the house with the geriatrics and the terriers, thinking they would not hurt him if he had a seizure. However, he much preferred being outside so we put him in with five young bitches who have a fenced acre and a 12 x 12 "house". Eventually, the inevitable happened and he was attacked during a seizure. When I went for him he didn't know me and it was awful trying to drag this 180lb, disoriented, drooling, bleeding mess toward the gate and safety. It took him until the next day to regain his composure. Weeks later, he had another seizure while in the house. The house dogs did not attack him but he did a lot of damage to himself that time. That was his last time and, believe me, the decision was very difficult. It was easy enough to say when you are in the middle of the crisis but the next day, when the dog looks and acts normally, doubt creeps in. Knowing full well that there would be another time, we took that trip to the vet.

For me, quality of life is the big issue. The dogs I have been involved with have not responded well to medication. There were problems with breakthrough seizures, lack of appetite and energy, disorientation and touch sensitivity. What kind of life is that for any creature? Much less one you love? If you want to try to intervene and manage the disease - go for it. But it is also just as right to decide to euthanise. This is a problem that you cannot cure, only manage and often not very successfully for human or dog. Only you can decide what is best for your dog, yourself and your family. It is not for others to criticize or question any decision that you make for your particular situation or problem.

I absolutely adore my dogs and my life with them. We've had Wolfhounds for almost thirty years. It sometimes seems there is no end to the "new issues to deal with" and this seizure disorder was certainly one of the worst. Once it has been introduced to or appeared in your breeding program, you have some tough decisions to make. And let me say here that we can all spend each others money and time better; raise each other's children better; and manage and breed each other's dogs better. Ringside

judging is a lot easier than standing in the center and actually doing the job. Knowledge makes you stronger if you use it in a responsible way. Hopefully, we will not have to wait through too many more generations before the blood test becomes available.

In the meantime, my opinion is as follows:

1.) Affected animals should be spayed or neutered and removed from the breeding program.

2.) Known producers - even when not affected - should be spayed or neutered and removed from the breeding program.

3.) Siblings and offspring of affected animals can be bred with caution if you feel compelled to take the risk. However, in doing so, keep one for yourself and sell the rest with spay/neuter contracts and on limited registration.

For those of you who maintain that none of these high-risk animals should be bred, beware that this is an unrealistic expectation. People are not going to dump 30 or 40 years of a breeding program and start over. The problem is not insurmountable and careful breeding can move us away from the risk.

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