



DBRG pleased to see *Veterinary Times* highlighting health testing

The DBRG welcomes the recent article in the *Veterinary Times* highlighting the hereditary health crisis affecting Cavalier King Charles Spaniels and other breeds, and the need for more stringent health testing.

Campaigners have worked hard over many years to draw attention to the issues affecting Cavaliers. Although much research has been carried out, the incidence of Mitral Valve Disease (MVD), Chiari-like Malformation and Syringomyelia (CM/SM), plus other conditions including pancreatitis, remains unacceptably high. All of these cause major welfare concerns.

‘As the majority of Cavalier breeders boycott the official CM/SM health scheme and a heart scheme promised in 2008 has yet to materialise, there is little hope of Estimated Breeding Values (EBVs) for Cavaliers getting off the ground,’ says DBRG founder Carol Fowler. ‘Many people believe that the Cavalier breed is now so genetically compromised that outcrossing to a related breed may be the only way of tackling these problems.’

‘The Kennel Club is a prestigious and wealthy organisation with the power to do what is right for the welfare of dogs. If it sets an example, breeders, including non-KC breeders, will follow,’ she continues. ‘The Kennel Club does not lack the know-how or influence to introduce an official heart scheme. We understand discussions are underway with cardiologists but there have been several stops and starts in recent years.’

The DBRG believes that Estimated Breeding Values are an important tool and could have a very positive impact on canine health. However, it believes a great deal more effort and action is required to make this a reality. ‘At the moment there are EBVs for hip dysplasia for some 20-plus breeds and elbow dysplasia for a very small number of breeds,’ says Carol Fowler.

‘EBVs are an impressive-sounding initiative but we are years, even decades, away from their reality for other complex conditions. They rely on phenotypic data from health screening. If official screening data does not exist, or where there are schemes and breeders fail to use them, EBVs are not possible,’ she explains. ‘We know that co-operation from breeders cannot always be relied upon.’

DBRG was pleased to read vet Emma Milne’s strong stance in the *Veterinary Times* and agrees with her that voluntary testing is not working. We understand the Kennel Club’s tradition of leaving the choice to breed clubs and individual breeders. However, the welfare implications are so great in some breeds, such as Cavaliers, that a much stronger approach is needed.

‘The official CM/SM scheme presented many challenges,’ says Carol Fowler. ‘It might never have got off the ground had it not been for the determination and passion of key individuals motivated to truly make a difference to canine health and to improve our understanding of this distressing and complex condition.’

Like Emma Milne, the DBRG would welcome pressure from the BVA and other professional veterinary bodies regarding health testing, including finalising and implementing an official heart scheme. DBRG would support the rapid introduction of breed-specific schemes rather than a 'one size fits all' approach. This would include a compulsory scheme for Cavaliers along the lines of the highly successful Danish version that has seen MVD fall in the breed by over 73 per cent.

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Note to editors

An abbreviated version of the Veterinary Times article can be seen online

www.vettimes.co.uk/news/issue-kennel-club-breed-testing-ultimatum-urges-vet

DBRG is an organisation dedicated to improving the health and welfare of dogs through responsible breeding. It was founded in 2013 and became a Charitable Trust in 2015. Members of the DBRG include veterinary specialists, dog welfare and law experts, breeders and dog owners.

For more information about the DBRG please visit www.dogbreedingreformgroup.uk or contact Carol Fowler carol@cavaliercampaign.com or call 01453 843944