HEAD BOBBING IN ENGLISH BULLDOGS: A RESEARCH PROJECT

Have you ever heard of head bobbing, head nodding, head shaking or the head tremor syndrome? These appellations all relate to the same entity; a medical condition that still remains officially unnamed but that has recently been published in the scientific literature as «idiopathic head tremors» in the Doberman Pinschers breed (Wolf and all, 2011).

Head and neck tremors of a very specific nature (bobble-head doll movement, head bobbing) characterize this condition (see video at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cVkriAHiKVM). The tremors generally appear at a young age (< 1 year old) in dogs of different breeds. The disorder is encountered in English bulldogs, French bulldogs, Boxers, Labrador retrievers, Doberman pinschers and other breeds, but it is in the English Bulldogs that it seems the most prevalent. The cause is unknown and the condition poorly described in the literature. There is disagreement among veterinary neurologists as to its origin; some assuming it is a type of epilepsy while others classify it as movement disorder. Although the evolution seems to be generally benign (the tremors eventually stop or become less frequent and severe), the tremors can become quite intense and affect the dog’s quality of life in some cases.

In order to characterize the disease further and establish what is the best treatment approach for dogs with head bobbing, we need to deepen our knowledge of this condition. We need to know exactly how it evolves in time and what causes it. We also think this syndrome is hereditary in the English bulldogs. To confirm our hypothesis, our research team based at the Neurology Service of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of the University of Montreal has designed a pan-Canadian epidemiological study looking at head bobbing in the English bulldog breed. We now need the help of the English bulldog breeders and owners to reach our goal.

Have you ever owned an English bulldog that showed similar head tremors? Has it come to your knowledge that some of the English bulldogs you bred developed head bobbing? If yes, we need your collaboration. The first phase of the study only involves answering an online or mailed paper questionnaire. The name of the responders will be kept absolutely confidential. Please contact us at shakingbulldog@gmail.com or by phone at 450-773-8521 x 0156 for more information or to enter the study.

Stephanie Dugas, DVM, Neurology Resident
Joane Parent, DVM, M.Sc., Dipl. ACVIM Neurology
Centre Hospitalier Universitaire Vétérinaire (CHUV)
Faculté de Médecine Vétérinaire (FMV)
Université de Montréal