

Sacha

Let me tell you about some of my dogs that have had spinal surgery. I don't want everyone to think it is all doom and gloom.

My first was Sofi 1, back in 1986. She had awful neck pain. In those days there were no referral clinics outside the big vet schools and I had to take Sofi down to Bristol - I live in Oldham, Greater Manchester. She was there for 10 days and when I collected her - during the first snowfall of the winter and on my wedding anniversary, I was unprepared for the sight of her throat cut for about 3" and her completely bald neck. I had no idea that they had to gain access to the spine via her throat. But, after a month's restriction she was back to her normal self.

When Sara went completely off her legs overnight my husband was going away, working in Berlin, so I was on my own. There were referral clinics by this time and so I only had to go a few miles to Manchester. She was referred on a Monday morning and by lunchtime I was there being seen by a wonderful orthopaedic surgeon by the name of Andy Torrington. He promised to phone me later that day, after Sara had had her surgery.

(That night there was an interview with Pip Boydell, who set up the Animal Medical Centre where Sara was being treated. I think it was for something like Watchdog and the fact that the general public had to pay so much more for drugs for dogs which were so much more expensive than they were for people. As he and the interviewer walked through the ward, there was my Sara, wrapped in a blue blanket!)

After eight days Sara was allowed to come home. She would have been home sooner but she wouldn't/couldn't urinate without having her bladder expressed manually but Andy phoned me and told me it could be psychological because she was only used to going in her own back garden. She came home that afternoon and, a couple of hours later, indicated to me (she couldn't yet walk) that she wanted to go outside and, sure enough, she did the biggest pee ever!! From then on she just got better day by day and you would never have known she'd had surgery.

Then it was Sacha's turn, about 18 months later and again, Andy operated on him.

Then we had a good run from 1996 until 2006. Then both Solo and Sofi 2 were hospitalised at our vets, they couldn't come on holiday with us because they both had bad backs. When we came home they were both referred to Andy, who had, by this time, set up his own Orthopaedic Referral practice in Yorkshire. Both of them had

spinal surgery and both recovered well and are now 10 years old and still enjoy long walks.

After Sacha had had his surgery I was asked to see a lovely elderly lady called Pat whose little mini wire had had spinal surgery and, like Sacha, had not done very well. We became good friends and used to look after Sam whenever Pat was away visiting family in London, Scotland or Australia. Sam was in hospital having a hip operation and Sam was with us, by this time an elderly boy with hypothyroidism and age-related problems. He became very ill and had to be put to sleep. He is now buried in our back garden.

After I had lost four dogs in the space of 363 days we got Solo and Saffron in 2002. When Pat was recovered from her surgery she wanted to adopt a little adult wire and I suggested to Saffron's breeder that Pat - who lived closer to the breeder than to me! - would be a good home if she wanted to find a pet home for Lily. She hadn't thought about it but knew what Pat had been through and so Lily went to live with Pat.

Then Lily went off her legs. Poor Pat was devastated because she had been through such a bad time with Sam. But our friend took her to a referral clinic, Lily had surgery and Pat could not believe it when she went to collect her three days later and Lily walked out to her. But it didn't end there. Lily developed neck pain and, within 18 months of back surgery she had to have neck surgery.

Pat died three years ago of a brain tumour and Lily came to live with her daughter and us. Lily is nearly 12 now, she has had two bouts of spinal surgery and, apart from a little hind limb uncoordination, she runs with all the when we go out or to the beach.

So in my household I currently have three dogs who have had spinal surgery (ages 12, 10 and 10 years) and they are all just as active as our three youngsters, 5, 5 and 4 years old.

BUT a word of warning! I had Sami, another RSPCA rescue. He came to us at the age of 3 when his owner died and soon after we discovered he had epilepsy. But not other problems. Then, at the age of 10, he went off his legs. He was a Dachshund so everyone thought 'Back, back, back!' and he was referred to a different specialist. Only because Andy was away, I must add. This man examined Sami and told us that, at the age of 10 with no history of back problems, he thought it was entirely unrelated and he was sure blood tests would prove that Sami had hypothyroidism which can cause peripheral neuropathy. My own vet had never heard of that as a symptom and many other vets hadn't. But, sure enough, the blood tests showed that Sami had an underactive thyroid.

I was at a lecture two weeks ago, given by Jean Dodds, a highly-regarded American/Canadian vet who is a world authority on thyroid problems in animals. I asked her how common peripheral neuropathy was in cases of hypothyroidism. She said that it was rare and affected larger breeds. I told her Sami was a mini Dachs and she said 'Oh my gosh! You were extremely unlucky!'

I think that sums up my history of Dachs-back problems!

Jean Collinson

21 Jun 2012