

## Pick of the Litter

By Dr. John R. Fleming, DVM



# Ovarian cancer: Know early signs

Those of you who receive our clinic emails will recognize this one (Sobering Lunch Sunday), but a review is always helpful.

The Illinois State Veterinary Medical Association's 130th annual meeting was this past Sunday in Lombard. Hundreds of lectures were given over the three-day meeting, and I would estimate that more than 1,000 veterinarians attended.

Lunch Sunday was around 11:45; we all made our ways down to the nice ballroom and were expecting a nice lunch and conversations with new acquaintances. We had the white tablecloths, nice china and fresh coffee! Halfway through the meal a speaker's program began. The presenters were from an ovarian cancer symptom awareness society; they had four speakers.

The first speaker was a veterinarian whose 19-year old niece was recently diagnosed with OC. The next speaker was an MD physician who is one of only 34 (I think he said 34) gynecological oncologists in the state of Illinois.

The reason this group was talking to us veterinarians is because our group had been chosen as a pilot association to see if they could use vets to get information out to our female clients about the warning signs of OC. If this new relationship with the ISVMA goes well, then they could use the information on how they did with us to determine better how to reach out to other groups such as dentists, teacher groups, etc. They selected vets because we are perceived as knowledgeable, compassionate and develop strong bonds with our clients whom we see often.

When was the last time you saw your doctor? Last year. When was the last time you saw your



Fleming family photo

Meet Red. We are visiting our daughter in Minnesota this weekend and Red is wearing me out throwing the Kong.

vet? Last week. It is true, we see mostly ladies bringing the pets in, and we see probably 100 or more weekly. The physician said that 1 in 70 women get the disease. He said it is very treatable if caught early. It is not necessarily "silent," but the disease "whispers" to you. He said that many doctors will not pursue your complaints because the complaints can be so vague. He said, "You have to ask to be tested for ovarian cancer! I have had so many angry women come to me for treatment and they were angry because their doctors did not pursue OC."

This is all new information to me. Until Sunday I knew very little about OC. Here is what the group wants us to do: Put brochures in our waiting rooms and, if appropriate, during the vet/pet visit ask our female clients if they know the warning signs of OC.

Here are the early (whispered)

signs: Bloating, feeling full quickly, abdominal pain and frequent urination. One of our lady clients on Monday was talking to us about this and she came up with the acronym F.F.A.B. (remember the Beatles? The Fab Four?). Feeling full quickly, frequent urination, abdominal pain, and bloating: FFAB. Another one of our clients later in the day told me about her 17-year-old niece who kept her symptoms of OC from her parents until it was too late. How sad.

When you see pink, you think of breast cancer. This society has chosen the color teal and the symbol of a goose. A teal-colored goose. As a profession we are proud to have been asked to help spread the word. Instead of just handing out brochures we are fortunate to have been able to send this information to over 1,600 of our clients and now, with this article, we are able to reach thousands more.