

President's Letter

Mitch Michaud

Summer is here and those of us in Alaska are experiencing a typical summer: cool, rainy, cloudy, and maybe a few sunny days. We are also celebrating 50 years of statehood. Dog mushing and dog care has moved forward in the past 50 years. The practice of letting your dogs loose to fend for themselves for the summer only to be rounded up in the fall may have actually been historically done in some areas of Alaska, but today the level of summer care and training has grown. Giving the dogs the summer off to loaf is also slowly fading away. Today most mushers have some sort of summer training and conditioning regime. Even if you are not able to condition your dogs through water training, spend time with each and every dog and make summer a rewarding time for both you and them.

PRIDE is also moving forward. Our membership has continued to grow over the past year. Past members are renewing, international memberships are up, more and more mushers in the contiguous 48 states are taking advantage of PRIDE memberships and publications. This has all occurred due to new and active board members taking initiative and telling PRIDE's story and being positive and proactive.

This newsletter contains the election materials for PRIDE Board Elections. I would encourage all members to donate the price of a stamp, and give PRIDE some volunteer time by voting for new or returning board members. New board members bring new ideas to an organization but likewise experience also has a value. The most important message on this subject is to look over the candidates and PLEASE VOTE.

Bridget Schwafel, our treasurer, has decided to step down early from the board. Her term was ending this fall, but before she left, she established a new accounting process for PRIDE using the help of an accountant, and other things that help more PRIDE to where it is today. Bridget religiously attended all the annual board meetings in Fairbanks and was very positive about PRIDE continuing when things looked dark. On behalf of the board and myself I wish to thank her for her past years help and assistance.

PRIDE is making a great leap this fall, with holding its annual membership meeting on the east coast. Our by-laws require PRIDE to hold an annual membership meeting at a recognized dog mushing event. This year the annual meeting will be held in New Hampshire (see notice in this newsletter). All members are invited to attend and for those members unable to travel to New Hampshire, please contact me at info@mushwithpride.org for information on how to participate via telephone.

There has been a great deal of interest from international mushers. This interest has come from exposure in trade magazines and from our web-site. The use of credit card payments has made foreign transactions much easier. For those of you that read MUSHING magazine you will see some great photos and stories about our international mushing brethren. Due to this increased interest, PRIDE is interested how we can better serve our international members. We will be sending all international members a letter asking what they would like from PRIDE and how we can help their mushing communities.

We will also be having changes to our web site, with some new formats. Website experts suggest that formats need to change often to keep the public coming back. Check us out on the web. We hope to have a new look soon.

On that note I would like to thank Theresa Daily for her past work on the web site and would recommend her and Daily's Web Design for all your Dog Mushing website needs, and we also look forward to Rose's work too!

-MM

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Deadly Horse Bacteria Affecting Shelter Dogs in US

Mushers should be advised about a deadly bacterial that has been making dogs in shelters ill across the US. The Spring of 2008 has been accompanied by outbreaks of a respiratory disease in dogs in shelters in California, Wisconsin, Nevada, and Florida. The bacteria responsible is *Streptococcus equi*, which is typically associated with horses and is the bacteria that causes equine distemper or "strangles".

These shelter outbreaks are the first known infections in canines. Signs of illness in dogs include a moist cough, fever, lack of appetite and depression. Experts suggest that this may actually be a secondary infection following more common diseases like *Bordetella* and *Parainfluenza*. Dogs with acute signs often have bleeding into the lungs (hemorrhagic pneumonia), which can result in death within 24 hours. If detected early, the bacteria can be treated with penicillin and several other antibiotics.

Mushers can help prevent an outbreak by working with their veterinarian to have a good vaccination protocol, cleaning and sanitizing enclosures, bowls, buckets properly, having good ventilation, and getting early veterinary care for any dog exhibiting signs of respiratory disease.

Safety with Kids and Dogs

Shawn Linendoll

Most of us, at one time or another, will be in a situation where we have kids or people who are not dog-savvy around our dogs - whether they are our own children, neighbor kids, people at races, or kids at a school or event you may be visiting. As dog owners, we need to stay aware and be able to keep children and visitors safe around our dogs.

We all spend many hours a day with our dogs. We know each dog inside and out - what upsets the dog; what makes each dog nervous or uneasy. When a child or a stranger comes over to visit, their first desire will be to go over and play with the dogs. But never let any child or stranger in your kennel unsupervised. Strangers may make the dogs nervous and kids come with abundant energy, high pitched voices, and faces that are right at snout and paw level. As you accompany the visitors, you can explain to them how to greet and visit each dog. This goes a long way in preventing a bite (or more commonly someone getting pawed or knocked down) while also keeping your dogs from being tormented.

Here is a small list of ideas and rules I use in my kennel for not only children visiting, but also adults (I have had more adults rather than children startle my dogs).

- 1) Teach visitors to pet your dogs under their chin initially, instead of on top of their head. Some dogs get nervous when a stranger reaches over their head, as this is a blind area for them. Most dogs will lift their snouts up when a stranger goes to pet them on the head, placing the dog's mouth closer to the hand reaching over their head. Under their chin is a less threatening approach for initial introductions.
- 2) Never let anyone enter your kennel without you present.
- 3) Know your dogs.
- 4) Never let strangers feed your dogs a snack or enter the kennel with food either on them or in their pockets.

- 5) Make sure your dogs are treated with respect. Never allow someone to pull their tails, poke their eyes, or step on their toes. If a dog is hiding in its house and does not want to be petted, visitors should respect the dog's wishes and give that dog his space.
- 6) Don't allow people to chase the dogs.
- 7) Don't allow a dog to be backed into a corner (or feel he is cornered).
- 8) Encourage your visitors to keep a calm quiet voice while with the dogs.
- 9) Don't allow people to bother the dogs while they are sleeping or eating.
- 10) Don't let the kids hug the dogs or kiss the dogs. We don't want their face getting scratched or them to startle the dogs.

Yes, many of these ideas are simple, but they are a way to easily allow positive interactions in your kennel. So please keep them in mind the next time someone comes over to visit your dogs or the kennel.

-SL

Stress Signals in Dogs

Dogs have a series of body language behaviors they use to show they are stressed that animal behavior experts call "calming signals" or "self-soothing behaviors". These are behaviors that may signal a dog has had enough attention and needs a break. (They are also used in dog vs. dog interactions, so they are good to recognize.)

Avoidance - turning their head away, turning their back to someone, crawling under the truck/in their house, etc. A turned back is a way for a stressed dog to say "maybe if I ignore it, it will go away". Best to have the kid pet another dog for a while.

Yawning - This is often mistaken for contentment, but it is a sign that the dog is in a little over its head. Some dogs yawn to self-soothe while waiting for dinner.

Lip Licking - A quick, nervous lick of the lips is a common anxiety signal. You see this a lot when kids are hugging a dog - it means they would prefer some space.

Shaking Off - Of course dogs shake off when they are wet, but they also use this as a "reset" function in stressful situations. Usually this happens after something makes the dog uncomfortable and he is walking away (like after the vet examines him), but it is also common at high-stress times.

Freezing - This is actually a step beyond a calming signal and is a last attempt effort to tell you to back off. Often this is coupled with "whale eyes". This is a signal to watch for - it can be a precursor to a snap or bite!

International PRIDE Ad-Hoc Committee Formed

Mush with PRIDE is pleased to announce the newly formed International PRIDE Ad-Hoc Committee tasked with looking into membership interests and concerns in other countries. We are currently looking for members interested in working on this Committee. If you would like to participate in this exciting new effort, please contact Mitch or Karen at info@mushwithpride.org!

Gastritis and Gastric Ulcers in Sled Dogs

Dr. Michael S. Davis, DVM PhD Dipl ACVIM

Gastritis and gastric ulcers are an important cause of illness and death in sled dogs, with a recent study showing that gastric disease was, either directly or indirectly, the cause of death in nearly 50% of the dogs that have died during Iditarod from 1994-2006. In 2000, I was asked to conduct a research program into the causes and prevention of gastric disease in sled dogs. The following is a summary to date of these studies, as well as recommendations and future directions of this research effort.

The "Scope" of the Problem

Our first efforts were directed at determining the prevalence of gastric disease in racing sled dogs. As most mushers will agree, sled dogs are a pretty stoic bunch, and therefore we knew that we couldn't simply rely on outward signs of disease. The gold standard for diagnosing gastric disease in any animal is gastric endoscopy, and in most subjects, this procedure requires general anesthesia. Other tests, though safer and/or cheaper, are not as accurate. Therefore, we conducted our initial studies by shipping endoscopy equipment to Nome to scope the dogs finishing the Iditarod. (Since the study was receiving logistical support from the Iditarod Trail Committee, the population selected was dogs racing in the Iditarod.) What we found was shocking - approximately 50% of the dogs that completed the Iditarod had abnormalities that would be considered significant in regular dogs that might be examined due to overt illness. In fact, dogs finishing Iditarod were statistically more likely to have significant lesions than "non-sled" dogs that were examined BECAUSE they had outward signs suggestive of gastric ulcers. This study confirmed a number of important points: First, that the problem affects far more than just the dogs that make the diagnosis obvious (i.e., vomiting a bunch of blood on the snow). Second, the dogs are really good at concealing the problem. Remember, since we were only scoping finishers, these dogs had not been showing any obvious signs of disease to either the musher or the checkpoint veterinarians. Third, that improving early detection through better examinations or monitoring was unlikely to be successful. Therefore, we knew that the only reasonable chance of eliminating the problem was through prevention.

Since that first post-race study, we have conducted 7 more studies that involved, in one way or another, gastric endoscopy of sled dogs after exercise (a total of nearly 300 dogs). The consistency of our results underscores the fact that the initial results were not an aberration, and that the problem is not unique to Iditarod. We have found the same 50-70% prevalence in studies done following subsequent Iditarod races, after shorter races like the Copper Basin 300 and the Kobuk 440, and after numerous simulated races, even at paces far slower than the typical racing pace. Gastric abnormalities are common in sled dogs after exercise, and can develop after only 100 miles. This latter point, illustrated in 2 studies conducted in 2004, raises the question of whether dogs can develop problems even during training. There is no evidence of progression of the lesions with additional exercise in the majority of dogs, although historically there are frequent reports of fatal gastric bleeding during long distance races.

A logical conclusion, based on these studies, is that racing causes gastric ulcers in sled dogs. That may only be partially true. We've conducted 4 studies in which we have scoped dogs BEFORE racing, and 2 studies in which we've scoped at variable times after racing to see how quickly the exercise-induced abnormalities heal. As a general statement, the stomach appears normal 4 - 5 days after the last bout of sustained exercise, although we occasionally find dogs (perhaps 2-3% of the dogs scoped before exercise) that have significant abnormalities past this point. However, when biopsies from the stomach are

examined microscopically, the stomach is clearly NOT normal. It is not surprising to find microscopic evidence of inflammation in stomachs that have visible lesions, but the presence of inflammation has also been confirmed in trained rested dogs and even in dogs that are untrained (i.e., rested throughout the summer). It is a relatively easy process to link pre-existing inflammation to the appearance of visible abnormalities with just a bit of additional stress. Therefore, although as a general statement it is correct that strenuous exercise may cause the VISIBLE signs of gastric disease, sled dogs in general (at least those that have been trained and raced in the past) appear to be predisposed to that process.

A second observation from these studies is that although the vast majority of trained, rested dogs have normal-appearing stomachs, not all do. That small percentage of dogs that have significant abnormalities even at rest has also been a consistent finding, and has caused speculation that although a large number of dogs will develop abnormalities during the race, it is the small percentage of apparently normal rested dogs with significant stomach lesions that develop life-threatening problems during the race. We've just started to consider this possibility, and do not have solid recommendations as yet as to how we might identify and address those dogs.

Prevention of Gastric Ulcers in Sled Dogs

Sled dogs are quite capable of concealing serious gastric disease until it becomes life-threatening, and since the only definitive way to detect gastric disease before it is life-threatening involves general anesthesia and specialized equipment, we concluded that the most likely strategy for reducing the problem of gastric disease during racing was to prevent the problem in all of the dogs. We have conducted 4 studies investigating the use of common anti-ulcer medications for routine prevention of exercise-induced gastric disease in racing sled dogs. The first study, conducted in the 2002 Iditarod, evaluated omeprazole (tradename Prilosec), administered once daily starting at the beginning of the race. The dogs from 3 teams were divided into 2 groups: Prilosec or placebo. The pills were carried by the mushers from checkpoint to checkpoint, but administered by the checkpoint vets out of sight of the musher so that the musher did not know which dog was receiving which pill. Gastric endoscopy was performed on all dogs within 24 hrs of stopping (either after being dropped or finishing the race). In addition, the veterinary books for each team were examined for reports of gastrointestinal problems. There was no effect of treatment on whether a dog completed the race, but there was a statistically-significant reduction in the severity of gastric ulcers in the dogs receiving omeprazole. There was also an increase in reported instances of diarrhea in dogs receiving omeprazole, although none of the cases of diarrhea were considered more than mild and no dog receiving omeprazole was noted to have diarrhea at two consecutive checkpoints.

One important feature of the study was the fact that, in general, the pills were administered to the dogs as soon as they entered the checkpoint, meaning that they were administered on an empty stomach. Omeprazole (indeed, the whole class of drugs that contains omeprazole) has poor absorption in the presence of food. This dosing scheme was optimal for determining whether omeprazole was effective, but unlikely to be used routinely by mushers during competition. Therefore, we conducted a second study using famotidine (tradename Pepcid), which is well-absorbed in the presence of food and can be simply included in the dog's meal. Famotidine was extremely effective in preventing exercise-induced gastric ulcers in dogs performing a single bout of exercise (100 miles in 18 hrs), but in another study conducted in the same manner during the Copper Basin 300, dogs receiving famotidine at a dose of 20 mg once daily (the same dose as the previous study of famotidine) still had substantial gastric disease after the race.

It is important to note that the untreated dogs had worse lesions than the treated dogs, so famotidine did have a beneficial effect. However, the dose used did not achieve the level of prevention that we seek. It is likely that a higher dose is needed, but we have been unable to confirm that experimentally (yet). The last study on prevention of gastric ulcers in sled dogs investigated the use of a powerful antioxidant supplement. Although the supplement decreased the degree of oxidative damage in the stomach tissues, it did not affect the presence or the severity of exercise-induced gastric ulcers in a 150 mile exercise challenge.

Assorted Questions that Remain regarding Stomach Ulcers in Sled Dogs

The large number of outwardly normal sled dogs with stomach ulcers, compared to the very small percentage of dogs with outward signs of disease, raises the question of whether all ulcers are potentially life-threatening. On one hand, it is logical that a big problem starts as a small problem and gets worse, and thus small, subclinical stomach ulcers can be viewed as the precursors for larger, more serious ulcers. However, the fact that these occur in an extremely small portion of the number of dogs predicted to have some abnormality of the stomach raises the question of what additional factors are required to allow exercise-induced stomach disease to progress to a significant, life-threatening condition. Widespread use of effective medications to reduce the prevalence and severity of exercise-induced stomach disease is too recent to provide any evidence of a reduction in the occurrence of severe consequences, although it is logical to expect such a reduction.

In the only large survey of stomach abnormalities in racing dogs (Iditarod 2001 study), there was no detectable association between the presence of stomach abnormalities and performance (based on finishing place or finishing time). There was no obvious association between the occurrence of stomach lesions and failure to complete the race in the Iditarod 2002 study, although the statistical power to detect such an association was quite poor. None of the studies conducted to date have been designed to determine whether a dog receiving effective anti-ulcer medication is faster than a dog that does not. There were numerous anecdotal accounts of improved appetite and attitude from teams that elected to treat their dogs with famotidine during the 2005 Iditarod. These reports could not be scientifically evaluated, but are consistent with reports from racehorse trainers following implementation of acid suppressive therapy in Thoroughbreds (racehorses have been reported to have up to 80% prevalence of gastric ulcers while in training), as well as people receiving acid-suppression therapy.

Hypothesis to Explain Exercise-Induced Stomach Abnormalities in Sled Dogs

The exact mechanism by which exercise-induced stomach abnormalities develop in sled dogs is unknown. However, drawing upon our findings to date, as well as from reports in other species, I have assembled the following possible chain of events:

- Exercise activates a number of processes designed to help the body adapt to this "new" metabolic demand. This type of activation is an absolute necessity for an animal to become fit, but is a double-edged sword. Obviously, the positive is to increase fitness.
- This requires increased energy and building blocks (proteins, carbohydrates, etc) directed to the tissues being modified (primarily the muscle).
- The body does this by restricting the amount available to other tissues, and by increasing the capacity of the body to acquire these components from the diet.
- The latter is accomplished by making it easier to absorb nutrients. Normally, the lining of the entire gut is "tight", selectively allowing the absorption of desired nutrients but excluding everything else.

- In order to increase the rate at which nutrients are absorbed, the gut may adjust to permit more rapid, but somewhat less selective, absorption of substances in the gut. (A study conducted by our group in 2003, and repeated in 2004 and 2005, demonstrated the exercise-induced increase in permeability of the gastrointestinal tract in sled dogs.)
- Normally, undesirable substances such as stomach acid are meticulously excluded, but relaxation of this requirement may accompany the need to increase absorption of desirable nutrients.

Thus, it is my belief that in the process of attaining fitness, circumstances will allow the acid in the stomach to periodically pass through the lining of the stomach and injure the tissue underneath, resulting in inflammation. The lining can readily heal (2-4 days), but the time required to completely resolve the inflammation (probably 7-10 days) is longer than the typical training interval. Consequently, training results in a persistent, low-level inflammation of the stomach. During the initial insult, it likely requires 4-5 days for the inflammation to fully develop. This persistent inflammation allows rapid redevelopment of the full spectrum of injury in less than 1 day. With increased injury comes increased stimulus for healing, and most dogs simply acquire a new balance between injury and healing in which there are always small lesions that may or may not be clinically significant. Rarely, some dogs are unable to acquire a new balance, or the balance that is struck requires severe injury and clinical disease. These are the dogs that show overt signs, and may be represented by that very small percentage of dogs with lesions before racing.

Based on this outline, a wider role for acid suppression in these dogs should be discussed between the musher and their veterinarian. One approach would be to routinely administer famotidine during heavy training, racing, and perhaps in the days leading up to competition. The rationale for use during heavy training is to eliminate the penetration of acid through the stomach lining during a period in which this lining is likely "open". Based on the absorption and duration of action of this drug, effective use would likely only require administration once on the day of exercise (approximately 2 hr before exercise, if possible). The rationale for use in competition would simply expand this logic to include the longer period of competition. The rationale for use leading up to competition is to assist in the resolution of any stomach inflammation that may have developed despite preventative steps. A modification of this approach may be to substitute omeprazole for famotidine, since during training it is more feasible to schedule dosing for when a dog has an empty stomach (i.e., about an hour before a scheduled meal).

Certain caveats must be recognized in this plan. Currently there is no definitive evidence that the abnormalities found in trained, rested dogs were the result of acid penetration through the stomach lining, so there is no assurance that suppression of acid secretion, either during training or during the lead-up period before competition, will result in improved condition of the stomach pre-race. Such a scenario is consistent with available data and not inconsistent with any data that I know of, but room for doubt still exists. Furthermore, although both famotidine and omeprazole have been found to be extremely safe in a large and varied set of studies, none have been conducted in this particular population. The possibility exists for impaired digestion of proteins (theoretical but never demonstrated in a clinically relevant manner in any study to my knowledge) and increased risk of bacterial contamination of the intestines (demonstrated in one study in India in children living in highly contaminated environments). For this reason, mushers should consult with their veterinarians before assuming the risks of widespread preventative medication in their kennels.

Credit where Credit is Due

This report summarizes a large number of studies and a great deal of progress in a short period of time. Such progress would not be possible without the resources and opportunities that have been available to our team of investigators. First and foremost, we would like to thank all of the mushers who have volunteered to participate in our studies. Their willingness is a testament to the commitment of the mushing community to the health and well-being of their dogs, and I know of no other field of sport, human or animal, which can claim more sincere support for the research that benefits their athletes. Similarly, we would like to thank the race organizations that have provided logistical support for the research, whether it was transportation, housing, or a place to conduct the examinations. Finally, we would like to acknowledge the organizations that have provided financial support for this research program, most notably the United States Department of Defense, the National Institutes of Health, the American College of Veterinary Internal Medicine, the International Federation of Sleddog Sports, the International Sled Dog Veterinary Medical Association, and the individual investigators who have contributed tens of thousands of dollars to keep the program moving forward when other sources of funding were short. Finally, we would like to thank the mushers and fans of mushing who have stepped up financially to support our work through the Snickers Memorial Ulcer Research Fund, formed by Karen Ramstead in memory of her lead dog Snickers.

Dr. Davis earned his veterinary degree from Texas A&M University in 1988, and has been a board certified specialist in veterinary internal medicine since 1999. He earned a PhD in physiology from Johns Hopkins University in 1999, and currently is a professor of physiology at Oklahoma State University since 1998, where his research addresses issues in veterinary and human exercise physiology. Dr. Davis has been recognized as the Sigma Xi Young Investigator at OSU in 2004, the Pfizer Award for Research Excellence in 2005, the Oscar Schalm Endowed Lecturer at the University of California-Davis in 2005, and received the Regents Distinguished Research Award at OSU in 2008. Dr. Davis has received multiple state, federal, and private grants to study the effects of exercise stress in animal models, particularly racing sled dogs. This work has resulted in detailed metabolic studies of the occult effects of stress, including mechanistic descriptions of the effects of occult stress on various organ systems. He is the senior author on over 30 publications related to stress physiology in companion animals.

The **Mush with PRIDE Annual Meeting** will be held during the Northern New England Sled Dog Trade Fair & Seminars, October 4-5, 2008 at the Hopkinton Fairgrounds in Contoocook, New Hampshire. All current PRIDE members are welcome - Plan on attending! For information on the Trade Fair, visit http://www.mainemadedogsleds.com/trade_fair.html.

Notes from the 2008 ISDRA Meeting

Ben Woodward

The New England Sled Dog Club (NESDC) was the host of this year's International Sled Dog Racing Association (ISDRA) Annual Meeting, Conference & Awards Banquet held on June 13, 14, and 15 in Portsmouth, NH.

PRIDE board member Ben Woodward was asked to be a presenter by meeting organizers Martha Heckman and Anita Wischinski at the 2007 Northern New England Sled Dog Trade Fair & Seminar. Ben's presentation was on the PRIDE Sled Dog Care Guidelines and Voluntary Kennel Certification program. At the end of the presentation current and former PRIDE members, from across the United States and Canada, exchanged feedback and ideas on how best to promote these guidelines and education. As an organization, ISDRA has been a long time supporter of PRIDE and its mission.

At the ISDRA Awards Banquet, PRIDE was presented with a \$500 donation by the New England Sled Dog Club. The money was raised by a season long raffle and auction at the banquet. Many **THANKS** to NESDC for its membership, support, and generous donation.

For more information:

International Sled Dog Racing Association, <http://www.isdra.org/>

New England Sled Dog Club, <http://www.nesdc.org/>

-BW



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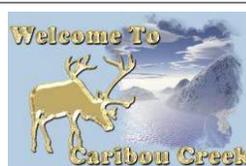


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