

News & Reports

Improving the health of pedigree dogs

By Suzanne Jarvis

A RANGE of actions are needed to improve the health of pedigree dogs, and multiple stakeholders must be engaged for progress to be made.

That was the outcome from the fourth International Dog Health Workshop (IDHW), held earlier this month and hosted by the International Partnership for Dogs (IPFD) and The Kennel Club in the UK.

Outcrossing more breeds and creating an international brachycephalic health group were among the key recommendations (see box). Working groups have been established to drive these actions over the next 18 months.

The workshop concentrated on breed-specific health issues. Delegates were split into groups and asked to suggest recommendations.

One group focused on brachycephalic breeds. It recommended that vets use a grading system to indicate severity of brachycephalic obstructive airway syndrome (BOAS) – a system that would be understandable by owners and could guide breeding and treatment options.

It also recommended working with breed clubs to introduce changes to breed standards – particularly for bulldogs, pugs and French bulldogs.

Another recommendation was that the IPFD sign up to the Global Pet Obesity Initiative position statement (<https://bit.ly/2X13wf5>), which calls for obesity to be recognised as a disease in cats and dogs.

Two of the groups recommended that outcrossing be used more widely to reduce health problems. They agreed that for some breeds the closed stud book approach was reducing the chances of producing healthy dogs and opening them to a more diverse population could help improve their health and fertility.

Jane Ladlow, senior lecturer in

small animal surgery at Cambridge University, who contributed to a ‘exaggerations and extremes’ group, said: ‘We focused on brachycephalic syndrome with action points generated to try and decrease some of the conformational-related diseases.’ In the bulldog, these strategies are already resulting in encouraging improvements with regards to airway obstruction.’

Delegates also recommended that breeding for fashionable traits should be more controlled and discouraged – and in some cases banned if the trait was causing health issues.

More could be done to try to persuade owners to change their behaviour, they agreed.

There was also discussion about how to engage breeders and breed clubs so that they felt part of the process rather than feeling ‘under attack’ and were also kept informed of the most up-to-date information on their breeds. One recommendation was for breed clubs and kennel clubs to engage particularly with vets so that they understood the issues and problems these groups faced.

Delegates also recommended that an expert panel be established to give genetic counselling advice and assess the application of genetic tests on a breed by breed basis.

It was generally recognised that improved communication was needed across all stakeholders, but Brenda Bonnett, chief executive officer of the IPFD, emphasised the need for ‘improved veterinary-breeder communication’.

Caroline Kisko, Kennel Club secretary and vice chairman of the IPFD, endorsed the collaboration at the workshops. ‘Many of us are undertaking extensive work in both dog health and welfare, so pooling resources makes sense,’ she said.

Dan O’Neill, senior lecturer in companion animal epidemiology at the Royal Veterinary College,

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE IDHW INCLUDE:

- Change breed standards to encourage better health
- Create an international brachycephalic health group
- Outcross and open stud books for some breeds
- Introduce a simple grading system for dogs with brachycephalic obstructive airway syndrome (BOAS)
- Work with search engine providers, online shops and social media channels to provide good information to the potential dog buyer
- Establish an expert panel on genetics
- Lobby on traceability/microchipping
- Research into areas such as dog relinquishment and the economic value of dog breeding

also highlighted the collaborative nature of the event but said the most challenging part was yet to come.

‘All of us with an interest in dog welfare now need to turn these recommendations into positive change over the next 18 months,’ he said.

BVA junior vice president Daniella Dos Santos, who attended the workshop, said: ‘BVA welcomes a number of the latest recommendations from the IDHW, particularly those around changing breed standards to encourage better health and discouraging breeding for fashionable traits.’

The IPFD is a group of independent stakeholders in dog health, wellbeing and welfare. Every two years it co-hosts the IDHW, with the aim to identify actions to improve the health and welfare of dogs. More information on the IPFD and the IDHW can be found at <https://dogwellnet.com/> ●

