

Dr. Elsa Sell

Our Health Survey Analyst

The Foundation is delighted to have Dr. Elsa Sell as our Health Survey 2004 analyst. She was chosen for her experience in analyzing and reporting data from other breed health surveys, her background in medical science and canine health studies, and her lack of involvement in the Kerry breed. Together, they insure an unbiased analysis, confidentiality of the data, and integrity of the reporting.

Dr. Sell is founder and Board member of the Bearded Collie Foundation of Health (BeaCon), a nonprofit foundation independent of the national breed club. BeaCon provides education, tracks health of Beardies with an open health registry, and promotes research. Dr. Sell developed the group's open health registry database and online data entry system.

Dr. Sell has also served as the health chair for the Bearded Collie Club of America (BCCA) where she managed an anonymous health survey. Based on the survey results, Dr. Sell was instrumental in setting up a research project with the Canine Health Foundation to study the inheritance and genetic markers for Addison's disease in Beardies.

Dr. Sell is a member of the BCCA, Portuguese Water Dog Club of America, and 2 herding clubs.

Health Survey 2004

Daryl Enstone, MSc & W. Jean Dodds, DVM

The goal of all members of the Kerry fancy—breeders, exhibitors and performance competitors, and pet owners—is a physically and mentally sound, happy, attractive, and long-lived dog that conforms to the breed standard. Despite the best efforts of committed breeders, health problems do crop up in all breeds, including Kerries. Prof. George Padgett (1998) documented 29 genetic defects occurring in the Kerry breed, based on his review of published veterinary literature and veterinary teaching hospital records.

Surveys are a way of obtaining information about the health risks and problems within a breed. In 1999, the USKBTC published the results of the first ever health survey of the Kerry Blue Terrier breed. This survey provided Kerry fanciers with a listing of concerns about cancers, PNA, autoimmune diseases such as thyroiditis and hemolytic anemia, various skin conditions, and other problems that occur in Kerries. The survey collected one information form per owner, providing a collective accounting of all dogs owned by that person. This format tallied the health concerns of owners and generated a baseline knowledge of the most common and the most serious problems in the breed. This was an extremely important and valuable step; however, it was unable to provide an estimate of the prevalence of each health concern in the breed. Since 1999, mailing lists and private reports to health and genetics representatives have provided additional, anecdotal information suggesting more concerns about cancers, the autoimmune neurological disease degenerative myelopathy, and hermaphroditism, which did not specifically feature in the USKBTC survey.

The current survey is designed to provide information on the type and prevalence of health problems in Kerries. It is based on a number of surveys previously carried out; in particular, the Old

English Sheepdog Club of America survey in 1990, and the Bedlington Terrier Club of America survey which is currently underway. This format requests that each owner fill out a detailed survey form for each dog they have owned during the last five years.

This new format will generate data not only on the presence, but also on the prevalence of each problem in the breed.

What exactly is prevalence and why do we want to know about it? Prevalence is a measure of the number of dogs with a particular health disorder, disease, structural fault or abnormality at any given time, divided by the population of dogs at risk. Prevalence is expressed per 100 dogs (i.e., as a percentage), which is termed a point prevalence rate. For example, from the Old English Sheepdog survey results (see Dodds 1995), of the 740 dogs entered in the survey, 99 of them were hypothyroid, and therefore the prevalence of hypothyroidism in the breed was 13.4%. Knowing the prevalence of each disease in the breed helps those who care about the breed decide which problems to be most concerned about when planning breeding programs or targeting health research dollars.

The 2004 survey consists of tabular response forms and a list of disorder codes. Each owner fills out the table of information requested about themselves. Then, one table is filled out for each dog owned in the past five years by answering the questions and by entering the codes for each disorder the dog has experienced. Additional information about each dog is welcome and owners may attach extra pages, if desired. To avoid duplicate reports on the same dog, if you have transferred a puppy or adult to a new home in the last five years, please do not report on that dog. Instead, encourage the new owner to report.

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When completing each survey form, *any condition affecting or altering the Kerry's normal state of health should be included, even if the condition is under control with treatment.* This allows the accurate determination of prevalence of these problems within the breed. It would be additionally helpful in these cases to make a note in survey form of the means of diagnosis (blood test, genetic test, biopsy, etc.), and the type of therapy and how successful it is. For example, if a Kerry suffers from dry eye syndrome, which is easily controlled with a cyclosporin ointment, this information would be useful not only in compiling the disorder frequency, but also in documenting a successful treatment protocol.

Why is it important to respond to the survey? If we could survey and receive responses from every living individual who has owned a Kerry Blue in the last 5 years, we would obtain the true prevalence of current health problems within the breed. As this goal is, naturally, impossible, we must locate and survey a group from within this population that gives an overall representation that is as close to the truth as possible—a microcosm of the Kerry breed.

This population ideally should equally represent all groups of Kerry owners—the dedicated Kerry breeders and exhibitors who are deeply interested in conformation and health issues, those that do not breed but participate in canine sports with their Kerries and are also concerned with the conformation and soundness of their dogs, and those who keep Kerries as companions and are not as interested in competition, but who want a healthy, happy, social, and long-lived companion.

To reach as many members of these population groups as possible, we are sending the survey questionnaire to members of Canadian and US breed clubs, and to a group of individuals who are non-club members and will receive the survey through the Foundation newsletter. We expect that many of the serious breeders and sports competitors

will belong to at least one club. Some pet owners will also be club members, but we expect that most will not be members. In addition, the survey will be available in downloadable format on the web, making it accessible to Kerry owners worldwide.

Our goal is to get approximately equal responses from each group of Kerry owners surveyed. However, there may be varying responses from each group, depending upon their needs and particular interests. Some breeders may not wish to respond because of the perception that they may be identified as having stock that throws a particular health problem, despite all efforts to ensure confidentiality. The problems with this type of knowledge becoming public are well-known within the Kerry fancy and are a strong deterrent to revealing health disorders. This may lead to an under-representation of breeder responses to the survey. We have attempted to mitigate this disincentive by having the surveys returned to and analyzed by individuals who are not members of the Kerry fancy and who are committed to preserving confidentiality, and also by separating the survey mailers, which may contain personal identifiers, from the surveys before they are analyzed.

On the other hand, pet owners may not fully understand the benefit they are providing by returning their responses if they have a healthy Kerry. The owners who have pets who experience health problems have more motivation to return their responses, biasing the survey toward more "unhealthy" Kerries. *We cannot emphasize enough the importance of receiving data about healthy Kerries as well as those that experience problems.*

Strict confidentiality of the survey responses will be preserved by returning the completed forms to Mrs. Marit Marino. Mrs. Marino was selected because she has experience providing this service, and she has no connections with the Kerry community. Mrs. Marino will remove the survey mailers before

forwarding the survey forms to be compiled and analyzed, thus separating any personal identifiers from the response forms. Dr. Elsa Sell is our survey analyst. Dr. Sell is an active member in Bearded Collie health issues, and has experience in that breed with health surveys and on-line health registries through her work for the non-profit charitable organization, the Bearded Collie Foundation for Health. Dr. Sell will analyze the information returned and provide a summary report to the KBTF Board, which will then make the report available to all members of the Kerry fancy. Our survey workers have committed to complete confidentiality regarding individual survey responses. Information about individual responses will not be released to any individual or organization, including the KBTF Board, without written permission of the animal's owner of record. Respondents can further assure their anonymity by not including a return address on the mailer or putting personal identifiers on the survey forms.

Our goal is to obtain information on at least 500 dogs, in order to provide meaningful health information about the Kerry Blue Terrier. Please help out this wonderful breed; fill out the response forms and return them as soon as possible.

References

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