

ROLE OF THE BREED HEALTH COORDINATOR

Having been the Breed Health Coordinator since the inception of the scheme some 10 years ago, I have recently notified the Breed Clubs of my intention to retire from the position in the future, once a successor has been identified by the Clubs. Until that time, however long it takes, I shall continue to maintain all ongoing health-related activities.

For the benefit of anyone who might be interested in taking responsibility for the role, I have been asked by the Clubs to outline what the job of a BHC entails.

In its broadest context, the function of a BHC is the collation and dissemination of information on all matters relating to health.

The KC has put together a job description for a BHC, which can be found at https://thekennelclub.org.uk/media/1097186/bhc_job_description.pdf. You might view this as being as much vague as specific, which is not surprising because the BHC role is a strange one in some respects, since the extent and nature of activities and involvement can vary tremendously amongst breeds, some having many health issues and others few if any. If you browse the KC website section for BHCs, you will find a lot of support documentation and facilities available, such as the BHC manual.

I think the most important starting point for a BHC is to recognise and accept that their prime responsibility is to act as a go-between or intermediary on Breed health matters, between the KC and the Breed Clubs and the general public. It is not for a BHC to decide unilaterally what will or will not be done regarding Breed health, though of course they would be expected to take the lead in proposing their thoughts and ideas to the Clubs for support, as I have done in the past. A consensus of support from the four Clubs is essential in my opinion. When expounding a view/opinion, or proposing some action, it is extremely important that it is based on sound scientific logic and knowledge, and not on the personal views of the incumbent.

There are only two regular commitments with which a BHC must comply. An Annual Breed Health Report must be submitted to the KC by the end of September each year. This requires identifying the 3 health issues perceived to be the most important for the Breed, together with a brief comment on what activity has been carried out in the past year in respect of each one. Similarly, the perceived 3 most important concerns for the next year have to be proposed. (There is no reason why they should not be the same ones). Once the 3 concerns are mutually agreed with the Clubs, online completion of the form takes a matter of minutes.

The second commitment is to undertake a health survey every 5 years or so. I have never heard of a case where the KC has insisted upon it in any breed, but it is not an unreasonable thing to undertake. It is easily the most onerous task for a BHC, but only in terms of the time it takes over quite a long period.

Attendance at the annual Breed Health Symposium (traditionally held at Stoneleigh in September) is not mandatory, but I would strongly recommend it. It is both interesting and informative, and the current format provides an opportunity for brief 1-to-1 discussions with representatives of the KC health team, the AHT, VetCompass, and other experts who might be in attendance.

There is a third ongoing subject coming to fruition this year, and that is completion of the Breed Health Conservation Plan ('BHCP') for Dalmatians. The initial BHC input into this required a summary of health concerns and the research and compilation of supporting scientific publications. This stage was completed at the end of 2018, and the next stage (imminent) will be discussions with members of the KC health team to agree a draft proposal which will then go to the Clubs for comment and input.

If anyone has any questions on the role of BHC, or would simply like to have a chat about it, they are more than welcome to contact me by phone, email, or at shows etc. Tel: 01543 490849/07787 152612, john_stevenson@btopenworld.com.

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