ABORTION, TERMINATION OF PREGNANCY in DOGS

BASICS

OVERVIEW

- Intentional medical or surgical termination of an unwanted pregnancy in a dog; may be accomplished by using drugs that prevent fertilization of the egg or prevent implantation of the embryo in the uterus or by using drugs or surgery to terminate an established pregnancy

SIGNALMENT/DESCRIPTION of ANIMAL

Species

- Dogs

Breed Predilections

- Unwanted pregnancy in any breed

Predominant Sex

- Female

SIGNS/OBSERVED CHANGES in the ANIMAL

- Depend on the stage of the pregnancy (gestation)
- May have no visible signs of pregnancy
- Discharge of fluid or developing fetus(es) from female genital canal (vagina)

CAUSES

- Medically stopping development of the "corpus luteum" or "yellow body" in the ovary that produces the female hormone progesterone, which supports and maintains the pregnancy
- Inhibiting the production of progesterone, the female hormone that supports pregnancy
- Using a drug to block the effects of progesterone, the female hormone that supports pregnancy

RISK FACTORS

- Drugs used to terminate a pregnancy may have undesirable side effects
- Medical treatment may require a great deal of time and effort
- Anesthesia and surgical risks if ovariohysterectomy (surgical removal of the ovaries and uterus, also known as a "spay") is performed

TREATMENT

HEALTH CARE

- Inpatient care is preferred to allow for monitoring of the patient; the patient should be monitored for at least 1 hour prior to discharge if the owner wishes to take the patient home
- Many accidentally mated dogs do not become pregnant; therefore, treatment may not be necessary
- Determining pregnancy status in the early stages is difficult because ultrasound confirmation of pregnancy is not possible until 4–5 weeks after breeding
- Medical treatment is generally done early in the pregnancy as later treatment may lead to more discharge and possible visually detected passage of fetuses

ACTIVITY

- No need to change the patient's activity following medical treatment
- Activity and exercise is restricted for several days following surgery if ovariohysterectomy (spay) is performed

DIET

- Delay feedings for at least 1–2 hours after medical treatments—reduces nausea and vomiting
- Follow feeding instructions before and after surgery if ovariohysterectomy (spay) is performed

SURGERY

- If breeding is not a consideration, ovariohysterectomy (spay) may be the best alternative treatment

MEDICATIONS

Medications presented in this section are intended to provide general information about possible treatment. The treatment for a particular condition may evolve as medical advances are made; therefore, the medications should not be considered as all inclusive.

- Prostaglandin $F_{2\alpha}$ or $PGF_{2\alpha}$ (Lutalyse)—causes breakdown of the corpus luteum and causes cervical dilation and uterine contractions
- Bromocriptine mesylate (Parlodel)—causes abortion and inhibits hormone, prolactin, that stimulates milk production
- Cabergoline (Dostinex)— inhibits hormone, prolactin, that stimulates milk production
- Prostaglandin $F_{2\alpha}$ or $PGF_{2\alpha}$ combined with bromocriptine or cabergoline
- Dexamethasone—mode of action not known
- Mifepristone (blocks the effects of progesterone) and epostane (prevents production of progesterone) are potentially useful; not currently available to veterinarians in North America

FOLLOW-UP CARE

PATIENT MONITORING

- Examination of uterus using ultrasound to confirm emptying of uterine contents

PREVENTIONS AND AVOIDANCE

- Surgical sterilization (ovariohysterectomy or spay) for dogs not intended for breeding
- Confine dogs intended for breeding during heat cycle, walk on leash, and observe carefully to avoid accidental breeding

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Medical treatment may shorten time until next heat cycle
- Estrogen compounds should not be used as treatment to cause abortion
- Bleeding, infection, and incision problems may occur following ovariohysterectomy or spay

EXPECTED COURSE AND PROGNOSIS

- Fertility may be preserved with medical treatment
- Ovariohysterectomy (spay) will eliminate heat cycles and fertility

KEY POINTS

- If breeding is not a consideration, ovariohysterectomy (spay) may be the best alternative
- Discuss all treatment options with the veterinarian, and come to a mutually agreeable treatment plan