

Chapter 7 – Health Care for our Rescues

Basic Wellness Exam

A detailed checklist of what is normally performed on a basic wellness exam is included in Chapter 2 on page 2-11. These are things that a volunteer should have taken care of when a dog comes into rescue. In addition to the things on this list, SOAR will take care of anything that ails the dog when they are brought into rescue...keeping in mind what the dog's quality of life will be. If you have any concerns about a particular dog that are not addressed on this basic list, feel free to contact one of the officers.

Lump Removal and Biopsy

Many times our dogs come into rescue with a lump or bump that may have to be removed. We will do a biopsy, but will not pay for chemo or cancer treatment for our rescues.

Tick-Borne Disease

Almost all areas of the country have a problem with tick-borne disease. Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever and Lyme Disease are two of the most prevalent. Become familiar with the most common tick-borne diseases in your area. When you rescue a stray or ANY dog with ticks, speak to your vet about the potential for tick-borne disease. Your vet may recommend titers (blood level of antigen) or prophylactic treatment with antibiotics for dogs that have a tick infestation at the time of rescue.

Female Urinary Incontinence

This is a common problem with spayed females. It can occur at any time after spay surgery. Loss of bladder tone results from the absence of female reproductive hormones. The female has loss of urine during sleep or when arising. This causes great distress to many people, and can often be the reason for abandoning a dog. This is easily and effectively treated by the administration of Phenylpropanolamine. This antihistamine contracts the urinary sphincter and provides greater control of urine. It can safely be given long term with virtually no side effects. Typical monthly cost is \$8-\$12. DES, a hormone, is also used to treat this malady especially when the dog has a heart condition. DES can have side effects so use it only if necessary.

Phenylpropanolamine is the drug of choice for female incontinence. Potty mistakes are sometimes reported by homes surrendering dogs to rescue. "He always poops in the living room," "She pees in the bedroom whenever we leave her alone." Often people cite potty problems as spiteful behavior on the dog's part in retaliation for being left alone. This is a red flag for the rescuer.

Dogs don't act spiteful or retaliate. They live in the moment! YOU have to be the investigator and figure out what's wrong. These dogs need a urine culture and fecal check done upon rescue to rule out a medical problem. Only then can behavior be addressed.

A 2-year old female was banished to living outside. The family went to great lengths explaining they had spent over \$1000 on an outdoor kennel to house her. She peed in the house frequently, which they attributed to spiteful behavior. They were angry and frustrated. They dismissed the possibility she may have a medical reason for her potty mistakes. Upon rescue she went to the vet for a sterile urine exam. She had a RAGING bacterial infection. After two weeks of antibiotics and re-check at the vet, her infection was gone and so were her mistakes.

Heartworm Treatment

SOAR treats all heartworm-positive dogs. If you take possession of a heartworm-positive dog, please call a SOAR officer. Depending on where the dog is, we may opt to move it before treatment. Not all vets are experienced with the different treatment protocols available. Dogs still die during treatment. We want to assure every dog with heartworm has the best care available.

A young dog tested positive for heartworm in Northern Michigan. The local vet began treatment. Unfortunately, the dog soon died as a result of liver failure. Our more experienced vet in Southern Michigan splits the dose in half to prevent such severe reactions to the toxic drug.

The recovery period for heartworm-positive dogs is critical. They must be fostered by someone who can be trusted to follow directions. As the live adult heartworms die, they decompose and detach into pieces. When these pieces pass through the circulatory system, they can lodge in the lungs or brain, causing stroke, pulmonary embolism and death. They can lodge in the arteries that supply the legs causing paralysis. To prevent this, the vet may recommend aspirin. Rest and restriction of activity are crucial. No walking, running or play during the critical period. (the first month.) Leash walking to potty only. The dog may become listless, cough or have poor appetite. These symptoms are caused by the body's attempt to absorb the dead heartworm pieces. This dog requires emergency treatment with antibiotics and prednisone. Dogs going through heartworm treatment need to be fostered by someone who is home and can follow through.

This dog is NOT a candidate for boarding at a kennel, or in any other situation where they cannot be closely monitored. Carefully follow through with the treating vet to be sure that heartworm preventative is given after treatment as prescribed.

Intact dogs will require treatment for heartworm and a recovery of several months before they can be spayed or neutered. These dogs must be carefully placed with the clear understanding of when spay/neuter is to be performed. This is to be documented as a condition on the Placement Contract at the time of placement if the dog is placed prior to when the spay/neuter can be done.. Be absolutely sure to follow-up with these dogs to ensure the conditions are met at the appropriate time.

Vaccinations

There has been discussion lately about the vaccinations our rescue dogs receive. Many vets are going to a "one shot includes all." A couple of our young SOAR dogs under the age of 3 developed Autoimmune Hemolytic Anemia in the past year – one of whom died. A suspected cause has to do with the dogs receiving their "one shot includes all" vaccinations just before the episodes. Both were healthy at the time.

Page 2-11 of this Guide mentions the things we should have done on the initial vet visit for a dog coming into rescue. Many of our dogs come into rescue with no shot records or without having had shots in quite a while. We have been getting all the needed shots done for our rescue dogs all at once on that initial visit. I would like to encourage all of you to discuss vaccinations with your vet when you take the dog in. If the dog is in poor health or a senior dog, see what the vet says about splitting the vaccinations and giving them a week or two apart.

Other Medical Problems

Soiling (fecal) in the house can be caused by parasitic infestation, or by not giving the dog enough opportunity to relieve itself outside. Some dogs (especially those familiar with fenced yards) can't go on-leash. Always give the dog the benefit of the doubt by ruling out medical problems before attempting to correct problem behavior. Untreated ear infections, arthritis, other serious medical conditions can severely alter any dog's behavior, causing irritability and temperament changes. Work closely with your veterinarian and observe the rescue dog's behavior during the foster period. You must be the detective.

A newly rescued male Airedale displayed bad temperament. He was loving, but at the same time unpredictable with his foster home who adopted him. They LOVED him but were very concerned by his behavior. Months after rescue during a routine vet visit, they discovered he had a cracked molar and abscessed tooth which had been causing him severe pain! Imagine living months with a toothache! He couldn't tell anyone. This dog could very well have been euthanized for his bad behavior.

Medical Problems That are Ongoing

SOAR has placed dozens of dogs with conditions requiring ongoing treatment and medication. Many adoptive homes are willing to bear the extra cost of medications for seizures, arthritis, urinary incontinence, etc. Please communicate with an SOAR officer when handling dogs that have special ongoing medical needs.

These guidelines are suggested based on our experience. If you have questions or concerns, please contact an SOAR officer. As you become involved with caring for rescue Airedales, it is helpful to approach your veterinarian for a discount on behalf of SOAR. Explain that you are fostering and caring for rescue dogs. Many veterinarians are happy to extend special consideration for rescue dogs. Typical discounts are 15-25%. If a letter from SOAR to the veterinarian is needed to obtain a discount, let us know!