X-RAY HYPE VS. HEALTH RISKS

Barbara J. Andrews, TheDogPlace Publisher

Let's start with radiation risk compared to the actual value of elbow or hip x-rays. Any astute dog person can tell if a dog is sound. The problem is that we can't be sure he'll stay that way or what he'll produce. *But wait, neither can the vet who takes the x-ray or the one who reads the radiograph!*

The risks of radiation are such that the dentist drapes a lead shield over your torso when all he's going to do is x-ray one little tooth located quite some distance from your reproductive organs. X-ray technicians take great pains to set up the exact target area before they get behind a lead wall and say "take a deep breath and hold it." OK, so X-ray techs are at higher risk because radiation exposure is cumulative. Right.

Human medicine faces the same quandary but the profit is so great (current insurance figures average $4,000 for MRI) that whole body scans are as common as dental x-rays. Speaking of which, we worry about using cell phones but think nothing of yearly dental radiation blasted right at our brains? Dare we look at the 20-year escalation rate of brain cancer?

So how many x-rays are safe? Dog breeders commonly x-ray their dogs for non-essential reasons. If an intestinal, spinal, or gastric x-ray is risky for human reproductive organs, then how can a hip x-ray possibly be safe for your dog when the full force of the beam is precisely aimed at the ovaries and testes?

Realizing that the use of disinfectants was once considered as radical as bathing, savvy dog breeders are beginning to question the marketing hype that leads our dogs down the primrose path to routine radiation exposure. Radiographs are a huge money-maker or some researcher would have done a paper showing that such cellular bombardment is directly linked to the extraordinary increase in genetic mutations.

Or maybe not. Remember the two Australian researchers Marshall and Warren, who pleaded with the profession about *H. pylori* bacteria. In 1985 they discovered that *helicobacter pylori* caused stomach ulcers but they were silenced (because the palliative treatments/surgery was too profitable?) for 20 years! Ultimately, they won the Nobel Prize in 2005 for what has been termed "the bug of the century."

Another example: According to study member Jerry Schnelle DVM, the Swedish hip dysplasia study of the 60's proved that x-ray was a flop at reducing the incidence of canine hip dysplasia. Dr. Schnelle was hushed up even though it was he who discovered CHD and led the research project. He subsequently resigned from the board of OFA (Orthopedic Foundation for Animals) with a statement published in JAVM stating that he could not attach his name to an x-ray of a dog he had not seen. He felt OFA diagnostic errors

(and they were rampant!) were the result of reading radiographs and grading hip x-rays without knowing the physical condition of the dog, including muscle tone, overall health, and whether a bitch had produced a litter.

Many veterinarians believe there is a distinct connection between vaccines, DNA damage, and horrific disease. [ref 1] Genetic mutations *are* occurring at an unprecedented rate but over-use of vaccines must share equal blame with the x-ray fad that compels eager-to-conform dog breeders. So a bit of logic seems in order.

A. Has hip dysplasia been reduced after more than 50 years of bombarding our dogs with radiation? If so, where is the published study?

B. The greater question is "has canine health deteriorated despite more attention to structure and genetic health - and more tests to determine both?"

C. Can we depend on the value of a single x-ray at 2 years or should all certification groups require another radiographic study at say, 4 years?

My answer to (A) is yes, hip and elbow dysplasia in show stock is much better, particularly in some high-risk breeds. There is no study that I'm aware of but a logical conclusion attributes that more to overall better breeding, feeding and rearing practices than to selection of breeding partners based on x-ray results.

The answer to (B) is an unequivocal "Yes."

(C) Presents a moral and medical dilemma. Who do we know that repeats an x-ray when the dog begins to demonstrate a joint problem? Once certified, it's for life - and that is medically UNSOUND logic!

One important question begs an answer. Why do many dog breeders avidly seek dysplasia-clear certificates but disregard show ring, performance or obedience titles which would reveal serious temperament problems, lameness, or that the dog is overused or abused? Why go to the trouble to get a non-predictive x-ray but refuse to spend a little one-on-one time getting at least a Rally title?

Which is more important to the dog? Which is more important to a buyer? One "lifetime" radiograph or a well-rounded, well cared for dog fit and sound enough to be put on public display?

Ref 1 - http://www.thedogplace.org/VACCINES/Genetic-Impact-10073_Jordan.asp

Related Article: **X-Ray Risks Shielded**

http://www.thedogplace.org/HEALTH/X-ray-Hype_Andrews-126.asp