

CHRONIC NON-HEALING STUMP GRANULOMA ON A DOCKED TAIL OF A DOBERMAN PINSCHER

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PRESENTATION & HISTORY

One-year-old Female Neutered Doberman Pinscher weighing 32kg presented with a chronic non-healing wound on her tail stump that had an improper tail docking at Day two by the breeder. The owner reported that the dog had the wound all along and that she hoped it would heal with time. Many types of treatment and different wound management modalities were tried since the dog was eight weeks old at the time of her first vaccination. For the past year, the wound had intermittent severities and never healed completely. The other dogs at home had a habit of licking the tail and the dog had occasional acute episodes of pain that results in severe biting and licking at the stump.

CLINICAL EXAMINATION & INVESTIGATION

The dog was presented for annual booster vaccination. She had good body condition and well kempt coat. She was responsive and alert, cardiopulmonary examination revealed no abnormalities and vitals parameters were within normal limits.

The tip over the tail stump had alopecia and the skin was ulcerated, the wound surface contained pale, irregular, and incomplete granulation bed with exudates at its centre and had a rancid smell. Epithelisation was very poor and irregular. There was little soft tissue support over the caudal vertebrae.

Haematology, serum chemistry, and urinalysis were unremarkable.

PROBLEM LIST/DIFFERENTIAL DIAGNOSIS

- Non-healing wound granuloma
- Pain and self-mutilation of the tail stump
- Rancid smell from the wound
- Probable neuroma formation at the tail stump

MANAGEMENT AND FOLLOW-UPS

The tail stump was short, ulcerated, and infected. The tail tip was very sensitive to touch and the dog would not let manipulation. Surgical management of the wound was considered, but could not be achieved without complete amputation of the tail. The owner did not consider total amputation as a viable option. The reason for the severe sensitivity thought to be due to a development of neuroma at the granulation bed. The owner was instructed to apply VetGold twice daily on the wound. A weekly follow up examinations were conducted, assessing the wound size, integrity and the presence of pain.

At the first follow up examination, the owner reported that the dog resented the application of the VetGold cream for the first two days, but there after she started to accept it well and was rather cooperative. During this week, the other dogs at the household stopped licking the wound, and less biting episodes noted. The wound appeared to be of the same size but less hyperaemic and no exudates observed. The rancid smell from the wound detected earlier was no longer a feature of this wound. Two weeks follow up examination, the wound started to show slight changes in its appearance and the granulation bed appeared healthier. Little hair started to grow at the wound edges but no mark changes in the wound size seen at that stage.

At four weeks, the wound reduced in size by half. Hair started to grow at the edges and it appeared dry. The owner reported that the dog does not have this frantic episodes of stopping, biting the tail any longer. There was no bad smell to the wound and the other dogs completely lost interest.

Eight weeks follow up examination revealed a healed wound. Hair growth occupied about 75% of the original wound. Only small area of healed, un-pigmented zone remained. The stump was not painful on manipulations and the owner reported that complete resolution of all previous complaints was noted.



Wound presentation at day one



Two weeks follow up



Eight weeks follow up

DISCUSSION

Stump granulomas are infrequent findings in general practice in the UK today due to the decreased occurrence of the tail docking. It is however still a problem and one of the listed postoperative complication of tail docking even if done by a skilled veterinary surgeon. It is uncommon to perform this procedure on puppies, for cosmetic reasons. It is consider unethical and illegal. Unfortunately we do see occasionally dogs that are docketed and with them the associated complications. It is not the intention of this report to deal with the issue of tail docking but only with the poor healing quality of these wounds and the ways to manage these problematic wounds.

Stump granulomas are developing mostly due to tension on the skin covering the caudal vertebrae, when not enough skin left to cover the stump. A development of neuroma may result in severe pain and self-mutilation and in repeat tail injury. This brings about vicious cycle that will retard wound healing.

Surgical resection of the neuroma and the unhealthy tissue, with amputation of at least one caudal vertebra can achieve resolution of all clinical symptoms and rapid healing. In this case, surgical management was not a consideration due to owner preference.

Conservative management of stump granulomas is frustrating in most cases due to the fact that the environment for wound healing is sub optimal and repeat injury frequently result in chronic non-healing wound. In the presenting case, the pain and sensitivity at the tail resulted in repeat injury and the rancid smell thought to attract the other dogs. Within the first week, twice-daily application of VetGold cream reduced the pain sensation and alleviated the bad smell from the tail stump. This seems to be the first step in the healing of this wound. The wound presented in this case healed completely within eight weeks. All associated signs, which considered perpetuating factors that retard the healing of this wound, were resolved.