



FUSsy Cats:

Feline Urologic Syndrome

It can happen quite suddenly - your cat appears very uncomfortable, frequently going to the litter box, straining to urinate, vocalizing while in the box, urinating small



Typical litter box posture of a cat suffering from Feline Urologic Syndrome

amounts in inappropriate locations, and possibly one sees blood in the urine. In such circumstances, cats need to be seen promptly by a veterinarian. If there is straining with no urine production, this is a life-threatening emergency.

All of these signs point to discomfort arising from inflammation of the bladder with secondary urethral involvement. The first steps in diagnosing the inflammation are to analyze the urine for blood, inflammatory cells, bacteria, and crystals; and to measure the pH. Treatment with antibiotics is started if there is evidence of infection. Urine may be sent to a lab for a culture of bacteria. If there are crystals or a complete urinary blockage, radiographs (X-rays) may be taken to determine if any stones are present. In the majority of cats, attempts to isolate bacteria are unsuccessful and there are no abnormalities seen on the radiographs. Still, these cats will have a large amount of blood in their urine, with or without crystals, and often the pH is more basic than is normal for a cat. This condition of urinary inflammation with no discernible cause is known as Feline Urologic Syndrome (FUS). While an area of active research in veterinary medicine, FUS remains a frustrating concern for owners and veterinarians alike. For most affected cats, the bouts of inflammation last for three to five days. Females are affected more often than males but males run the risk of a urinary blockage due to the smaller diameter of the urethra (the passage from the bladder to the

outside). The urethra can become obstructed with a mix of red blood cells, crystals and mucus and often requires emergency sedation and catheterization to remove the obstruction plus hospitalization to treat the secondary electrolyte imbalances and dehydration.

A change in diet is recommended for cats with crystals or pH abnormalities. The goal of the special diet is to reduce the risk of future stone or crystal formation. These diets are formulated to have lower quantities of the mineral precursors to the crystals and contain compounds which alter the urine pH toward a more normal value. In some cats the inflammation lasts a week or longer and these cats may be prescribed additional medication. Even with a change in diet there is a risk of recurrence. The most effective method to decrease recurrence is to increase water intake. This is accomplished by feeding or supplementing with a canned food, always providing fresh water, and encouraging drinking with pet water fountains or offers to drink from the sink faucet. In many cases the risk of recurrence decreases with age. FUS is a disease of which all cat owners should be aware. Recognizing the early signs of your cat straining to urinate and spending more time at the litter box can help decrease the risk of a blockage. This potentially life-threatening disease can usually be managed and treated with a good outcome.

So, you want to be a veterinarian?



old Guillermo Altamirano interviewed Dr. Askren for a school project. We thought that we would depart from our traditional articles and include a transcript of the interview for

The doctors at Shoal Creek Animal Clinic are often asked questions by young people considering a career in veterinary medicine. Recently, fourteen year

any of our young clients who may also want to work in the field of veterinary medicine.

Guillermo: What can I be doing now, while in high school, to help me prepare for a career in veterinary medicine?

Dr. A: There are many ways that you can begin to prepare for a career in veterinary medicine. One option would be to volunteer your time at a local humane society or animal shelter. Both the animals and the staff will benefit from the extra help. Also, you will be able to learn a lot about caring for companion animals. Many communities have pet visitation programs for the elderly or disabled. This is another opportunity for volunteer service and can provide insight into the beauty of the human-animal bond. A good place to check would be your local Council on Aging. There is always the option of seeking employment (or a volunteer position) with a veterinary hospital. There are some limitations to what you would be allowed to do because of your age. For example, you must be eighteen or older to assist in taking X-rays. However, some hospitals will employ young people to work in the kennel and to help groom pets. Finally, if you don't already own a pet, consider adopting one. Pet ownership is a joyful and rewarding experience that will serve you well as a future care giver to other pet owners.

Guillermo: What kind of skills, besides the special training that I will receive in school, do I need to be a vet?

Dr. A: You must be a good student. It is very important to work hard in school. Grades do matter...but even more important is to learn...and cultivate a love of learning. A decision to become a medical professional is a decision to become a "life-long" learner. Your study and learning does not end with high school or college or veterinary school. You will be studying and learning for the rest of your professional career. If you don't enjoy learning, don't pursue a medical career. Also, it is important to pay attention to detail. My father used to share this with me when I was young. As a doctor, I realize how important it truly is. It is the details that can save or lose a life. Here is an example...A cat was brought to our hospital because his owner thought it had a broken leg. When the pet was examined, there were no broken bones but he could not use the front left leg.

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The toe pads on that foot were not quite as pink as the other feet and they felt a little bit cool. Those observations are details. You may not think they mean much but actually they do. This cat had a blood clot that was compromising the circulation to the left front leg.

Attention to detail extends well beyond observations when examining a patient. It includes everything from how well you clean your room to checking your spelling on a term paper! It should be a way of life for someone in the medical profession.

One of the most important things a veterinarian needs to be successful is a love for people. I share this with every young person who asks me about becoming a vet. Most usually say they want to be a vet because they love animals so much. That is great...and equally important. But, do you love people? Every single patient you will treat as a veterinarian will have (at least) one person attached to it...and maybe even an entire family! Even zoo veterinarians must work with the animal handlers...some of whom are more mothering than the dearest kitty-cat owner. In my opinion, it is not enough to just love animals. Veterinarians must have a deep and abiding passion for people, too. This obviously is not a skill but, rather, an innate quality. However, it is an important question to ask oneself in considering a career in veterinary medicine.

Guillermo: What would you say is the best and worst part of being a veterinarian?

Dr. A: One of the best parts of being a veterinarian, or any type of doctor, is successfully diagnosing and treating an illness. There are few things more rewarding than helping to restore a patient to good health. For me, another great part of being a veterinarian is relationships - relationships with pets and relationships with their owners. I love getting to know people and their animals. I love working with them to help them live the healthiest life possible. I love being there when that companion is a puppy or kitten and the owner is struggling with training and also being there for them when that pet is old and needs help with arthritis. This brings me to the worst part of being a veterinarian. Sometimes, despite all our advances in medicine, there is a medical problem we can not resolve and the patient is suffering. With animals, we have both the gift and the burden of being able to humanely end that suffering. Although humane euthanasia can be considered a final act of love for a pet, it remains a difficult and emotionally draining act. However, having

the ability to end the suffering of a beloved pet and to aid a grieving owner in their loss are very important aspects of our profession.

(For a complete transcript of Guillermo's interview, visit our web site at <http://www.shoalcreek.com>.)

Staff News

Welcome!

Our two newest veterinary assistants are

Allison Williges and Bethany Barrett.

Allison, a New Jersey native, received a BS in Biology from the College of William and Mary and hopes to attend the UGA College of Veterinary Medicine in the future. Outside of work she enjoys reading, cooking, and horseback riding. Bethany is from St. Simons, GA and has wanted to be a veterinarian from a very young age. Bethany is currently an Animal Science Major at UGA. In her spare time, Bethany enjoys reading, shopping, and playing with her Airedale, Susanna.

Farewell...

Amy Messer has taken a veterinary assistant position at the University of Georgia College of Veterinary Medicine Intensive Care Unit.

Angie Dordigan is stepping down from her position as Shoal Creek Animal Clinic's Office Manager. Recently, Angie has successfully completed her studies to become a licensed realtor. We are pleased to share that Angie will continue to work at Shoal Creek part-time.

Other News:

Allison Williges is a participant in The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's Team In Training® and will be running in the San Diego Marathon on June 5 to raise money for this worthy cause. Team In Training® was founded in 1988 and since then 220,000 participants have raised more than \$500 million. Seventy-five percent of the money raised goes to support cancer research, advocacy, and patient services, with a goal of curing leukemia, lymphoma, Hodgkin's disease and myeloma. If you would like to support Allison's efforts, you may e-mail her at abwill@gmail.com or pick up an informational sheet when you are next at the clinic.



Shoal Creek Animal Clinic

2226 Barnett Shoals Road

Athens, GA 30605

706-369-0962

animalclinic@shoalcreek.com

<http://www.shoalcreek.com>

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