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THE DIAGNOSTIC APPROACH TO THE MOST

Rabbit medicine is regarded as being difficult by many of us.

At many universities this branch of our profession is under-represented, and thereby the veterinarians under-educated. And so are the owners...

OK, the rabbit itself is absolutely not the easiest kind of patient, as will be discussed in the previous lecture.

The reasons why owners go to their veterinarians with their rabbit vary from vague complaints, such as losing some weight, eating less and being slower than normally, to quite clear observations, like serious weight loss, abnormal breathing, lameness, stranguria, diarrhea, and skin/fur problems. It is a remarkable fact that in rabbits with vague complaints there is often something going on that, if ignored or not treated properly, can lead to the loss of the rabbit's life. This is due to the MPS-factors (in dutch: the SVP factoren) and the complex SAS phenomenon, which is explained, is the first lecture. The well-defined problems are unfortunately very often not treated adequately, due to shortcomings in diagnostic procedures. However, it is so easy to do it right, simply by pretending the rabbit is a cat! So when you are confronted with something aberrant that you do or don't recognize, do what you would do if were a cat, so do skin scrapings, needle biopsies, urine- and faecal analysis, blood counts and make x-rays. It's no use to treat a swollen joint with antibiotics for weeks when you are dealing with an osteosarcoma! There is, however, one big complication. You are still dealing with a rabbit. So keep in mind that this animal has lifelong growing teeth. Dental problems can cause subtle and vague complaints as well as serious weight loss, so in those cases the oral cavity always must be inspected thoroughly.

In this contribution I make an attempt to familiarize you with rabbit medicine in primary practice. How to approach any problem and what is a useful diagnostic pathway to get a proper diagnosis.

Finally, when you have come to a clear diagnosis by proper examination, but you are not equipped for an adequate treatment, again, what would you do when it is a cat?