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WHY IS A RADIOGRAPH OFTEN INDISPENSABLE IN SICK RABBITS AND RODENTS?

We all know the term 'coincidental finding'. This refers to something aberrant that you may find in a diagnostic procedure that was not intended to reveal this finding; the finding was not the cause of the problem, for which the research was intended. An example is a splenic tumor that is seen on an ultrasound or X-ray examination of the bladder in a dog with haematuria.

The splenic tumor, which had nothing to do with the miction problem, is found by chance. Though this specific coincidental finding can be life saving, such findings are no reason to submit every patient to radiation, simply because there might as well be found 'something'.

In R&R medicine however, things are different.

When I was preparing a lecture years ago, I browsed through many R&R radiographs in my archive. I used to make an X-ray of every sick rabbit and guineapig just to get an impression of how gas masses are formed in the GI tract of these animals. To my surprise, on many of those radiographs abnormalities could be seen at a closer look! Abnormalities that I missed at first inspection, that could have caused pain and stress to the animal, and probably revealed the primary cause of illness.

Since that moment I realized that every abnormality that can be seen on a radiograph of a diseased rabbit or guineapig is important. These animals are extremely sensitive to pain and stress by developing a deadly GI stasis after a banal pain stimulus anywhere in the body. This Secondary Atony Syndrome, SAS, will be discussed the next day.

So, in my opinion, an X-ray is indicated in nearly every case of a sick rabbit or guineapig, not only to make sure if the animal is developing SAS and, if so, how severe, but also because of the possibility to find the primary cause.

Besides that, an X-ray should be made in any case in which you should do so in dogs and cats, like haematuria, lameness, and dyspnoea and before surgical removal of a malignancy.

Due to the limited access to examination of these often very small animals, as well as the often inadequate observations of the owner, a radiograph is a helpful tool to make these patients more transparent to us.

Many abnormalities will be localized in the skeleton and in the thorax or consist of calcifications. Considering there is often too much gas in the abdomen, ultrasound may be less suited to these species, beyond a simple overview x-ray that shows almost the complete body.

In summary we can say that in cases with vague symptoms such as weight loss, lethargy and anorexia as well as with specific problems, such as anxiety, dyspnoea, lameness, diarrhea and tumors an X-ray is essential for getting a correct diagnose as well as an adequate therapy.

In this lecture I will support this statement with many radiographic images.