Pyometra and CEH - by Susan Little DVM

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Cystic Endometrial Hyperplasia/Pyometra
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a) Etiology: It has typically been believed that because cats are induced ovulators, the incidence of cystic endometrial hyperplasia (CEH)/pyometra is lower than in dogs. However, recent studies have shown a great many cats are also spontaneous ovulators, and therefore may experience prolonged diestral periods without pregnancy. Repeated pseudopregnancies may predispose the uterus to CEH, which is a disorder of proliferative and degenerative changes in the endometrium associated with aging. Most queens with pyometra were in estrus some time in the preceding 60 days. Potter et al (1991) reported that 40% (16/40) of queens with pyometra or endometritis had CLs. Lawler et al (1991) reported that 67% (20/30) queens with pyometra had luteal phase ovaries.

Progesterone causes hyperplasia of the endometrium and endometrial glands. Other effects of progesterone include inhibition of local leukocyte responses to infection in the uterus and decreased myometrial contractility. Estradiol causes an increase in the number of estrogen and progesterone receptors in the endometrium. It also causes cervical dilation during estrus and therefore allows bacteria that are part of the normal flora of the vagina (especially E. coli and Streptococcus spp) to ascend into the uterus. It is normal for cats to have both aerobic and anaerobic bacteria in the vagina. Younger cats have more vaginal bacteria than older cats, and cats in heat or pregnant have more bacteria than anestrus cats. Vaginal cultures are therefore hard to interpret since the queen has normal bacterial flora. This combination of ascending bacteria and an abnormal endometrium predispose queens to pyometra.

b) Clinical symptoms and diagnosis: Cats with CEH may or may not have endometritis. CEH tends to be a chronic subclinical condition and may be hard to diagnose definitively without biopsy of the uterus. A presumptive diagnosis of endometritis may be made from response to antibiotic treatment, which should last for 2-4 months. Uterine pathology, mostly secondary to CEH and endometritis, is common in queens over 5 years of age. CEH is very common in unbred queens over 3 years of age. Perez et al (1999) found that 88.2% of queens older than 5 years in a breeding colony had CEH, versus a 30% incidence in queens 2-4 years old. A group of feral queens also sampled had no CEH. They concluded that colony queens showed a predisposition to CEH that was correlated with elevated serum estradiol concentrations. CEH is one of the most important causes of infertility in catteries. Cats with advanced CEH are occasionally found with mucometra or hydrometra, characterized by variable amounts of mucus in the uterus. In hydrometra, the mucin is thin and watery. In mucometra, the mucin is thick or even semisolid. Queens with either condition do not have bacterial infections and are not systemically ill. The main symptom is abdominal distension, with or without a vaginal discharge. The clinical signs of pyometra include a vulvar discharge, depression, dehydration, anorexia, fever, weight loss and a distended abdomen. Any abnormal vulvar discharge in an intact queen should be assumed to be due to pyometra. However, 15-30% of queens have no vulvar discharge (closed cervix). Queens are often very meticulous in grooming, however, so evidence of the discharge may be hard to find. A surprising number of queens with open cervix pyometras have little or no signs of systemic illness. Very occasionally, pyometra is found during a routine annual health examination. Polyuria and polydipsia are far less frequent in queens with pyometra than bitches. Most queens with pyometra will have a leukocytosis with a left shift. The diagnosis can be affirmed by finding an enlarged uterus on radiographs or ultrasound. In some cases, the uterine enlargement is segmental, mimicking a pregnancy. Occasionally, only one horn of the uterus is involved. Cats who have CEH but not pyometra may be normal on physical examination. Their blood and urine tests are normal. Ultrasound of the abdomen is
very sensitive in detecting uterine enlargement. Radiographs are not as useful, but being able to
see the uterus on a radiograph usually indicates the uterus is enlarged. The final diagnosis is
often not made until exploratory surgery is performed and the uterus is removed and/or
biopsied.  c) Treatment: There is no specific treatment for CEH. Theoretically, a prolonged
period of anestrus may allow for some normalization of the endometrium. Progestagens must
be avoided. Mibolerone is effective in inducing anestrus in cats, but is associated with serious
adverse effects. Maintaining queens in less than 10 hours of daylight may induce a photoperiod
anestrus.  Initial treatment for pyometra may involve intravenous fluids and antibiotics. Since
E. coli is the most common bacterium involved, good antibiotic choices are enrofloxacin
(Baytril®), trimethoprim-sulfa (Tribrissen®), or clavulanate-amoxicillin (Clavamox®). It is not
usually necessary to perform a culture and sensitivity test on the uterine discharge. Antibiotic
therapy alone for pyometra is not often successful. Douches using antiseptic or antibiotic
solutions are also not effective. One series of 183 queens (Kenney et al, 1987) with pyometra
found an 8% mortality rate, most commonly associated with a ruptured uterus and peritonitis.
Two approaches to treatment of pyometra may be taken: ovariohysterectomy and prostaglandin
therapy.  i) Ovariohysterectomy provides the most consistent results as the source of the
problem is permanently removed and cats recover quickly. For queens who are not valuable to
a breeding program, this is probably the best choice.  ii) Prostaglandin therapy has been the
most successful treatment for open-cervix pyometra where it is desirable to preserve the future
fertility of the queen. Success rates for return to fertility may be as high as 86%. Prostaglandin
F2α (PGF2α) has been used both for pyometra and for metritis postpartum. The best queens
for this therapy are under 6 years of age, in good health, and have no retained fetal material if
they are postpartum (ultrasound is very helpful in determining this). PGF2α therapy is
contraindicated in queens with some medical conditions such as asthma. PGF2α therapy
should not be used if the queen is in poor condition or is critically ill. Careful assessment of the
patient is critical for ruling out conditions that could preclude the use of PGF2α. For example, in
rare cases, pyometra is associated with uterine torsion, a contraindication for PGF2α treatment.
Treatment of closed cervix pyometra should only be undertaken with caution, and only in
medically stable, young and otherwise healthy queens. If the cervix does not open after a few
days of therapy, or if the queen becomes ill, she should be spayed.  Only natural prostaglandin
is used since a dose has not yet been established for use of synthetic prostaglandins for this
purpose in the cat. Queens are treated with 0.1 mg/kg of dinoprost (Lutalyse®) SC, once or
twice daily for 5-7 days. The main purpose of the PGF2α is to cause the uterus to contract and
expel its contents. The luteolytic effects of PGF2α seen in other species have not been
documented in the queen. If the feline CL does responds to PGF2α, it seems to take several
days of treatment to effect luteolysis. Queens need to be watched closely during PGF2α therapy
and may be hospitalized for the part of each day which follows administration of the drug.
Queens must be monitored for rising fevers, abdominal pain, or other symptoms of systemic
illness or rupture of the uterus (which could lead to peritonitis). Monitoring with radiographs or
ultrasound may be needed in addition to blood counts. The rate of complications with this
treatment is very low.  Side effects are noted often, usually within minutes of the injection, and
will be worse in the first 2 days. The contractile effects of PGF2α on the smooth musculature of
the myometrium, GI tract, respiratory tract, and bladder account for these reactions. Common
side effects include restlessness, vocalizing, panting, vomiting, diarrhea, salivation, and intense
grooming of the flanks and vulva. These effects usually last only a few minutes, rarely lasting
longer than 15-20 minutes. The reactions become less obvious with each treatment. Usually by