

Senior and Geriatric Dogs Have Unique Needs

Senior and geriatric dogs experience more health and quality of life issues compared to younger demographics. Age is the biggest risk factor for disability, disease, and death in this subset of patients.¹ Because of this, senior and geriatric dogs represent a unique patient population that requires strategic implementation of evidence-based medicine and care.

Comorbidities and Age-Related Health Conditions

Along with higher rates of disability, disease and death, elderly canines have increased rates of comorbidities and quality of life concerns.^{2 3 4 5} Age-related conditions include but are not limited to: cancer, chronic pain (including dental and orthopedic pain), quality of life issues, decrease in senses, cognitive decline, mobility issues, sarcopenia, and frailty.

Decreased Physiological Reserves

Aged humans and dogs have decreased physiological reserves and ability to respond to stressors. In humans, this corresponds to a higher likelihood of adverse health outcomes and a greater risk of hospitalization and death.⁶

Though senior and geriatric dogs also face the challenges mentioned above, diagnostic and treatments that may require sedation or anesthesia are often still necessary to maintain health and quality of life in these patients. Given their unique needs, a strong focus should be placed on pre-anesthetic workup and appropriate conversations with owners to weigh the pros and cons and ensure interventions are appropriate.

Quality of Life and Caretaker Challenges

A focus on managing and preserving quality of life should be a part of the medical care of senior and geriatric dogs at every stage of health. Caretaker fatigue is a challenge that largely affects this demographic of pets who often have higher needs and require greater assistance at home. Both require consideration in caretaking plans for senior dogs.

Conclusion

Because of the unique considerations facing senior and geriatric dogs, a strategic approach should be implemented when caring for these patients. In addition to treatment, a focus on prevention as well as maintaining health and vigor are important in this demographic. These approaches should extend throughout an elderly dog's care from in-hospital, outpatient, and at-home settings.

¹ <https://avmajournals.avma.org/view/journals/ajvr/83/6/ajvr.22.02.0027.xml>

²

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/310601400_Multiple_morbidities_in_companion_dogs_a_novel_model_for_investigating_age-related_disease

³ <https://avmajournals.avma.org/view/journals/ajvr/83/6/ajvr.22.02.0027.xml>

⁴Adelman, R. D., Tmanova, L. L., Delgado, D., et al. (2014). Caregiver burden: a clinical review. JAMA, 311, 1052-1060.

⁵ Schulz, R., & Beach, S. R. (1999). Caregiving as a risk factor for mortality: The Caregiver Health Effects Study. JAMA, 282, 2215–2219.

⁶ https://rgnkc.ru/images/pdf_documets/Benetos/Frailty_Review_2016.pdf