

### A Frightening Week in 2007

By Kathy Lang

It was approximately a year ago that it happened. I want to share my experiences with you in hopes that you'll be alert and aware in the event something similar happens with your Belgian Sheepdog.

It was time to spay Flame (Am Can Ch Kaylan's Flaming Obsession CD RN PT). She was six years old and in perfect health. She was bred once (the previous year) and it had been a couple months since her last heat cycle.

My vet performed a routine spay and discharged Flame with a three day supply of pain medication, specifically Rimadyl. (I wasn't aware of the changes in veterinary protocol and the routine prescribing of pain meds, which have been documented to speed recovery following major surgery.) Flame's initial recovery seemed uneventful. The incision was healing well and she was returning to her normal self.

About a week after her surgery, we were just hanging out at my training center. I was sitting in a chair chatting with a friend and she was lying at my feet. Suddenly Flame stood up and vomited a tremendous amount of blood (probably 8 ounces or more).

I realized something must be seriously wrong, so I grabbed my purse and a friend for moral support, asked others to take care of my other dogs and headed to the parking lot. Before I could get her in the van, she threw up more blood.

I was in tears driving to the emergency vet, with thoughts of cancer running through my mind. I called the ER from the van to let them know I was on my way.

At the ER they did an initial exam, gave her some fluids, did an X-ray and took her history. Nothing extraordinary, in fact Flame was acting perfectly healthy. They could see nothing wrong, but did be-

lieve my report about the vomiting of the blood.

They wanted to keep her overnight for observation and I, of course, agreed. It was quite a stressful evening as I fretted and worried about all the possible things that could be wrong with my beloved black dog. I called and emailed folks for their thoughts about this sudden vomiting of blood. I researched veterinary web sites and could come up with nothing concrete.

The next morning's call from ER was reassuring. Flame was doing well; in fact everyone at the clinic was falling in love with her. She was eating bland canned dog food and they were ready to send her home with a wide range of stomach calming medications and antibiotics. There still was no definitive diagnosis.

Flame responded well to the medications. No more vomiting, eating well, acting normal and continuing to recover from her spay surgery.

My regular vet was as stymied as the ER doctors and the consensus was, the only way to rule out cancer and possibly get to the bottom of her bloody vomiting was to do an endoscopy.

As much as I didn't want to see her anaesthetized again so soon after being spayed, I had to know what was going on. The possibilities included cancer, an H. Pylori infection and ulcers.

She was scoped the next day and biopsies were taken. The initial report revealed massive ulcers. Biopsies that came back later were totally clean. No cancer.

During my conversation with the doctor who performed the endoscopy I received a phone call from the owner of Flame's sister, Crystal (Ch Kaylan's Crystal Persuasion), Stephanie Weil.

Crystal had just vomited blood. And Crystal had been spayed by the same vet at the same time as

Flame. Crystal was also sent home with Rimadyl.

Good grief. Two sisters. Two spay surgeries. What in the world was going on?

Stephanie had been alerted to Flame's situation, so she immediately contacted our general veterinarian who was also consulting with the ER clinic and the doctor who performed the endoscopy. Crystal was immediately started on the same medication as Flame, but we jointly made the decision not to scope her.

As best as we can tell, the cause of the bleeding in both Flame and Crystal was the Rimadyl. It seems that Flame and Crystal had experienced one of the rare, but possible side effects of Rimadyl (and other NSAIDS): ulcers. (For more information visit [www.rimadyl.com](http://www.rimadyl.com) )

My vet has red-flagged my dog's charts. No more Rimadyl for any of them – ever. (An interesting aside: Flame's grandfather, Tyler (Am Can Ch Lorjen Double Entendre' UD OA OAJ) who just passed away at the age of 13 ½ was on Zubrin [another NSAID] for age-related arthritis and he never had any problems with that medication.)

Today, a year later, Flame and Crystal are doing great—no further episodes of vomiting blood.

What started out to be a simple spay surgery turned into a \$1700 nightmare, that in retrospect could have been prevented. No one seems to know if Belgians are more susceptible to ulcers following treatment with Rimadyl, or if my dogs just seem to have more sensitivity to the drug.

You might want to share my experience with your veterinarian and keep this in mind when pain medication is warranted in your Belgian Sheepdog.

## *A word from Rory Friedow*

The above article was reprinted with permission from the Belgian Sheepdog Newsletter. Members may contact Kathy Lang, the author, with comments or for release information at [askkathylang@aol.com](mailto:askkathylang@aol.com) .

I will elaborate on a couple points from Kathy's article.

- 1) Pain medication following surgery: The current standard of veterinary care now requires veterinarians to either prescribe or offer pain medication post surgically for most procedures. As Kathy states the anti-inflammatory effect has been shown to speed recovery. You may decline the medication or discuss your concerns with your veterinarian. Dogs have very different pain tolerances and may do well without medication.
- 2) The Health Column in the June/July 2004 Performer discussed NSAID (Non Steroidal Anti-Inflammatory Drug) Associated Risks. The risks are similar in all the NSAIDs; changes in the gastro-intestinal tract, liver and kidneys. Watch for decrease in appetite, vomiting, change in bowel movements (diarrhea, black, bloody or tarry stools. For more complete information visit the Rimadyl website or check the owner information relevant to your specific NSAID. Others include Zubrin, Metacam, Deramaxx, Previcox and aspirin.
- 3) Are Belgians more sensitive to NSAIDs and other drugs than the general population? That is an interesting question and I would appreciate feedback from the membership on problems they have had with any medications. In the June/July 2000 Performer I wrote of a personal experience with a client's Malinois and the Sulfa drug, Primor. This Sulfa sensitivity in Malinois has also been noted by other veterinarians. Anecdotal information suggests they are sensitive to anesthetics (require lower doses) and are more prone to gastro-intestinal irritation from a variety of different medications. Next time think twice before you give that leftover pain medication. Is it really needed and do I understand and accept the risks?