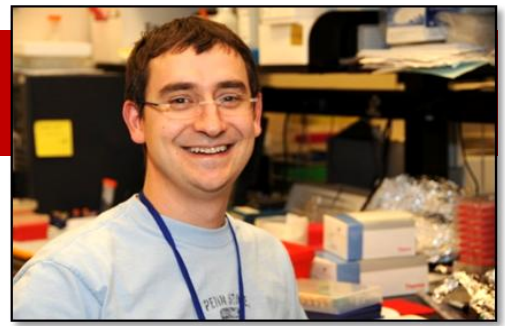


LETTER TO PCA MEMBERS ~ April 2010
From Dr. Jeff Shoenebeck, Ostrander Canine Genomics Lab
National Institutes of Health



Dear Esteemed Members of The Pekingese Club of America,

Greetings from the Ostrander laboratory! This past December I had the honor of meeting many of you at the Pekingese National Specialty, held in Indianapolis, IN. During the PCA Specialty weekend, I was pleased to introduce a project the Ostrander laboratory is initiating, in cooperation with the PCA, to address the genetic underpinnings of Brachycephalic Airway Syndrome (BAS). As I am sure most members are aware, BAS takes a terrible toll on the health of the dogs it affects. Beyond obvious difficulties in breathing, animals affected by BAS are prone to gastric problems, exercise intolerance, overheating, and even premature death. Our laboratory's goal is to identify and understand the genetic component(s) responsible for causing BAS. Should we succeed, the results of our study may enable development of screening procedures to help breeders remove the causative genetics of BAS from their breeding stocks.

As with all studies, significant legwork needs to be done to enable our laboratory to even begin mapping the genetics of diseases. Inevitably, the most significant hurdle is finding enough samples to study. As was outlined in December's presentation at the PCA Specialty, we are asking members to donate blood samples from their dogs, to use in the BAS study. At this time, we are most interested in dogs whose health histories are free of BAS AND blood samples from those dogs that have been diagnosed with BAS.

Drs. Terill Udenberg and Nicolas Small have been instrumental in kick starting the blood sampling drives both in the US and in the UK. Both Dr. Udenberg and Dr. Small have volunteered their time, resources, and expertise to promote awareness and owner participation in the BAS study. Dr. Small's enthusiasm for the BAS study has made inroads in the UK and through his tireless efforts, we hope to gain formal support for the study from breed clubs in the UK.

To date, Dr. Udenberg has collected blood samples and evaluations from 28 dogs here and abroad. However, among the dog bloods collected thus far, only a small fraction of samples were from Pekingese definitively affected by BAS. So while our efforts have been successful at beginning to sample Pekingese which are asymptomatic for BAS, acquiring samples from affected dogs to use as a contrast has been much more difficult. So to make this study a success, I encourage members interested in supporting this study to enlist their best dogs, as well as dogs that are clearly affected by BAS. Only with representation from both comparison groups can we move ahead with the much more exciting phase of this research, which is mapping the genetics of BAS.

At future breed club events like the PCA National Specialty held this past December, we hope to conduct health evaluations and blood draws. In today's difficult economic climate, finding the resources to pay for such blood drives remains challenging, however we are hopeful that funding such efforts will be possible in the future.

In the meantime, the collection process must proceed, as the sooner we collect sufficient numbers of dogs, the sooner the Ostrander laboratory can begin genetic mapping of BAS. Should you be interested in donating blood samples to the BAS project, I encourage you to contact our Samples Manager, Donna Viglietti, for information regarding our blood kits. Donna can be reached at dog_genome@mail.nih.gov or by telephone (301-451-9390). Upon request, she will mail the kits to you, which can be filled by your veterinarian at your dog's next regular checkup. Most vets are happy to oblige with taking blood samples for little or no cost, since it is in support of a good cause. When ready, the kit should be mailed back to our lab within 2 days by regular USPS mail. No special packaging procedures or paperwork are needed for shipping the blood. Given the difficulties and stresses of transporting dogs affected by BAS, sending blood kits could be a more appealing option than having us sample/evaluate your dog at a future venue. However, for dogs affected by BAS, we ask that you give your veterinarian permission to disclose your dog's health records, so we can clearly understand the presentation of BAS in your dog.

Working together, I am optimistic we can meet the challenges of BAS, for the betterment of Pekingese health. The success of any of the Ostrander laboratory's health studies rides on the enthusiastic support of breed club members. My experience from meeting many of you in Indianapolis is that the PCA (and their UK counterparts) are ready, able, and willing to address BAS head on through the support of the Ostrander laboratory's research. Pekingese might be small dogs, but let no one forget that they are lions at heart! Pekingese needn't back down to anyone or anything – certainly not BAS!

Sincerely,

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