The Canine Eye Registration Foundation (CERF)

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

There are multiple heritable eye diseases in dogs, which affect many breeds. Removing animals with these diseases from breeding programs will decrease the prevalence of the diseases in future generations. The Canine Eye Registration Foundation (CERF) is assisting breeders in this process.

What is the Canine Eye Registration Foundation?

The following information was adapted from a brochure published by the Canine Eye Registration Foundation.

CERF is dedicated to the elimination of heritable eye disease in purebred dogs through registration and research. The organization was founded by a group of concerned, purebred owners/breeders who recognized that the quality of their dogs' lives were being affected by heritable eye disease. CERF was then established in conjunction with cooperating, board certified, veterinary ophthalmologists, as a means to accomplish the goal of elimination of heritable eye disease in all purebred dogs by forming a centralized, national registry.

The CERF Registry not only registers those dogs certified free of heritable eye disease by members of the American College of Veterinary Ophthalmologists (ACVO), but also collects data on all dogs examined by ACVO Diplomates. This data is used to form the CERF data base, which is useful in researching trends in eye disease and breed susceptibility. This data is useful to clinicians and students of ophthalmology, and to interested breed clubs, individual breeders, and owners of specific breeds.

How does CERF function?

After the painless examination of the dog's eyes, the ACVO Diplomate will complete the CERF form and indicate any specific disease(s) found. Breeding advice will be offered based on guidelines established for that particular breed by the genetics Committee of the ACVO. Bear in mind that CERF and the ACVO are separate, but cooperating entities. The ACVO only provides their professional services and expertise to ensure that uniform standards are upheld for the certification of the dog's eyes with the CERF organization.

If the dog is certified to be free of heritable eye disease, you can then send in the completed owner's copy of the CERF form with the appropriate fee ($10.00 for the original CERF Registration, or $7.50 if it is a recertification). CERF has adopted a policy effective Jan. 1st, 2001 that a permanent identification in the form of microchip, tattoo, or DNA profile will be needed for any dog to be registered with CERF. The certification is good for 12 months from the date of the exam and afterwards, the dog must be reexamined and recertified to maintain its registration with CERF.

Regardless of the outcome of the dog's exam, the research copy of the CERF form will be sent to the CERF office at Purdue University where its information will be entered into the data base for that specific breed. This information will be used in generating research reports, but the individual dog's identity will become confidential and will never be released.

How is DNA testing used by CERF?

CERF serves as the repository for DNA testing information and will register dogs that have been shown by a DNA test to be free of certain abnormal genetic traits. The CERF policy is as follows: The breed club must select the test they think will provide them with the best information for their breed. CERF provides logistical support to facilitate the running of the test and register those that are found to be free of the gene defect. Some of the tests will render more information than just positive or negative, so the breed club must decide how to use that information. To date, this has worked quite well. If a breed club wishes to pursue gene testing and a test is available, CERF is available to help develop the testing program.

What can CERF do for breeders and pet owners?

The CERF can provide:

- A registry of purebred dogs that have been certified free of heritable eye disease.
- Memberships which may include the CERF Newsletter, and various registration and research reports to keep you up-to-date on selected topics in canine ophthalmology.
- Periodic reports on the prevalence of eye diseases in certain breeds, including reports generated by the Veterinary Medical Data Base (VMDB), which compiles data from 24 participating veterinary colleges in the U.S. and Canada.
- A centralized source to answer questions such as: - 'Is there an AVCO Diplomate located near me?' - 'Are there any published materials on eye disease in dogs that can help me to better understand my dog's condition?'

For more information on CERF, or to find board certified veterinary ophthalmologists near you, contact CERF at:

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