Among the most concerning health conditions to breeders and owners of Doberman Pinschers are genetic conditions, such as wobbler syndrome, and the complex heart disease, dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM). Organizers of the Health Night Seminar, held Oct. 4 at the 87th annual Doberman Pinscher Club of America (DPCA) National Specialty in Fort Mitchell, Ky., invited prominent veterinary researchers to discuss their advances in better understanding these diseases plus others that affect Dobermans.

Mark Neff, Ph.D., the founding director of the Program for Canine Health and Performance at the Van Andel Research Institute in Grand Rapids, Mich., and Luis Braz-Ruivo, D.V.M., D.V.Sc., DACVIM (Cardiology), of the Dogs & Cats Veterinary Referral in Bowie, Md., were the featured presenters at the Health Night Seminar. Additionally, a team of board-certified veterinary cardiologists provided a no-cost comprehensive cardiac screening clinic to identify Dobermans in the early asymptomatic or occult stage of DCM.

“We were delighted to bring in such distinguished veterinary experts to speak at the Health Night Seminar,” says Kathy Davids, D.V.M., chair of the DPCA National Specialty Health Seminars Committee. “The opportunity to provide the cardiac screenings at no cost and to have these esteemed veterinary cardiologists examine our Dobermans was a bonus. This is the first time we’ve offered such comprehensive screenings at no cost to owners.”

Tapping into a Doberman Database

With a rich database of blood samples and pedigree information about Doberman Pinschers, the Van Andel Research Institute has made progress in learning about wobbler syndrome and other disorders that affect Dobermans.

“We have far more data on the Doberman breed than any other breed,” Neff says. “The more data we have, the more power we have to understand the ramifications of the diseases and conditions affecting Dobermans, and for that matter, to learn how these findings may translate to other breeds and potentially humans.”

Neff is seeking a genetic link to cervical spondylomyelopathy (CSM), commonly called wobbler syndrome. A disease that can lead to partial or complete paralysis, wobbler syndrome takes its name from the wobbly gait of affected dogs.

Doberman Pinschers are predisposed to slippage of the intervertebral disks in the narrow vertebral canal surrounding the spinal cord. The condition causes pressure on the spinal cord and nerve roots, resulting in mild to severe instability walking that worsens over time. Dogs suffering from wobbler syndrome may have neck pain, general weakness and difficulty getting up from a lying position. Chronic active hepatitis (CAH) also is being studied. “We believe this disease in Doberman Pinschers may involve the accumulation of copper in the liver,” Neff explains.

Ongoing inflammation that results in progressive damage to the liver cells, CAH causes scar tissue that over takes healthy liver tissue and eventually leads to liver failure and death. Early signs, which include poor appetite, intermittent vomiting and lethargy, occur in other health conditions, so owners often do not learn their dog has CAH until the disease progresses to a severe condition.

Dogs with advanced disease may suffer from fluid buildup in the abdomen, or liver encephalopathy, which is the inability of the liver to eliminate ammonia and other toxins, and ulcers in the gastrointestinal tract.

Though it is not known definitely whether CAH is an inherited disease, the higher incidence of this disease in Doberman Pinschers relative to other breeds suggests the involvement of genetic factors. These factors may interact with environmental influences.

“A benefit of identifying causal genes is that it increases the power for detecting nongenetic influences,” Neff says. He hopes that while this disease in Dobermans is distinct from one in Standard Poodles, the genes involved may function in a common biochemical pathway. If so, progress in one project may benefit the other.

Neff’s enthusiasm for working with the Doberman Pinscher community stems from their first success. Two years ago, Neff’s laboratory at Van Andel began research that recently culminated in the discovery of a single-gene mutation responsible for an autosomal recessive disorder that causes bilateral congenital vestibular disease with juvenile deafness, referred to by breeders as “dings.” In affected dogs, the vestibule, a cavity in the inner ear containing tiny bones and sensory cells, begins to deteriorate shortly after birth. Signs of the disorder

Cardiac Screening Clinic Deemed a Success

More than 225 Doberman Pinschers received comprehensive cardiac screenings Oct. 2 to 4 at the Doberman Pinscher Club of America (DPCA) National Specialty in Fort Mitchell, Ky. The screenings, which were available at no cost to owners, were provided by a team of board-certified veterinary cardiologists. The purpose was to identify Dobermans with the early-stage asymptomatic or occult DCM and validate blood-based screening tests to help detect the fatal heart disease that affects 25 to 50 percent of the breed.

The screening tests included:
- A physical examination
- A blood sample for biomarker and DNA testing
- Echocardiogram to detect heart structure and function abnormalities
- Three-minute electrocardiogram to assess heart rhythm

Results from the echocardiogram and electrocardiogram were provided to owners on site. In addition, participants could elect to take part in a lottery to receive a no-cost Holter monitor up to six months after the National Specialty. Holter monitors provide information about the heart rhythm over a 24-hour period. Results would be provided after the monitors were returned and analysis completed.

Continued on page 2
include head tilting, lack of coordination and circling. Deafness occurs around 3 weeks of age. “Discovery of the gene was a direct consequence of working with breeders who were enthusiastic about finding a gene; it is true of all successful studies in canine genetics. By partnering with the breed community, great progress can be made.” Other diseases that affect Dobermans that are being studied at Van Andel include: head bobbing syndrome, canine compulsive disorder and two cancers, osteosarcoma and melanoma. The wide range of genetic and health disorder research under way at Van Andel is possible because of the support the institute has received from Doberman Pinscher enthusiasts. As an example, a recent anonymous online health survey available for two weeks on the DPCA website (www.dpca.org) received 1,700 responses. Respondents could provide contact information if they were interested in submitting blood samples for further research. More than 1,400 people provided their contact information. “The best dog biologists are not people in laboratories like me, but rather, the breeders and owners who have built up decades of insights through their experiences,” Neff says. “That is why their participation in studies such as these is so critical. Developing genetic tests that can be used by breeders to guide their breeding decisions is the end game of our research.”

Study Changes DCM Treatment Protocol

Dilated cardiomyopathy is an inherited, irreversible heart muscle disorder that affects 25 to 50 percent of Doberman Pinschers. It causes the heart muscle to become weak, leading to heart failure and ventricular arrhythmia, or abnormal, erratic heartbeats that fire too closely together. This can cause a dog to die suddenly or to live a much shorter life. Some dogs recover after fainting, yet others die suddenly. About 50 percent of Dobermans with DCM die suddenly due to ventricular arrhythmias. In 33 percent of Doberman Pinschers, sudden death is the first clue they had the disease. Ventricular arrhythmia, or the sudden death due to DCM can occur in Dobermans as young as 3 to 4 years of age.

Dobermans with DCM that do not die suddenly generally appear normal until they are 4 to 7 years old, when their heart muscle is no longer able to compensate for the disease and becomes significantly weakened and dilated. As the disease progresses, congestive heart failure occurs when the heart can no longer adequately pump blood to the body. As the heart dilates to compensate for the weakened heart muscle, it holds a greater volume while the thinned walls continue to weaken. Fluid typically backs up into the dog’s lungs causing pulmonary edema, but it also can back up into the abdomen causing ascites. During this symptomatic stage of the disease, owners often notice signs of heart failure, such as shortness of breath, rapid breathing, coughing, weakness, and lethargy. Symptomatic DCM usually is diagnosed in Dobermans around 7/2 years of age, after many have already been bred. Diuretics therapy offers palliative care for symptomatic DCM but does not cure the disease. Medications that strengthen the heart muscle make it easier for blood to flow forward and help remove the extra fluid accumulation in the lungs or abdomen. While medications can help dogs feel better and prolong life, the disease still is terminal. Dogs with congestive heart failure typically live less than a year.

Dilated cardiomyopathy generally is present for six to 18 months before a dog develops heart failure. The early stage of the disease, known as the asymptomatic or occult stage, is difficult to diagnose because affected dogs are apparently healthy, feel well and often have no outward signs of the disease even when evaluated by a veterinarian. Tests such as echocardiography, an ultrasound of the heart, and Holter monitoring, a 24-hour electrocardiogram (EKG), are required to definitively diagnose the disease during the asymptomatic stage. A recent clinical study, called The PROTECT Study, showed that Dobermans with asymptomatic DCM that received pimobendan, which is marketed as Vetmedin® by Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica, remained asymptomatic 63 percent, or nine months, longer than Dobermans that received a sugar pill placebo. About 1,000 apparently healthy Dobermans in the U.S., U.K. and Canada were screened to recruit the 76 dogs that took part in the five and a half year study. In the study, the average time for Dobermans with asymptomatic DCM, characterized by a weak heart muscle documented with echocardiography, that received Vetmedin to develop heart failure or die suddenly was 24 months, compared to 15 months for the dogs in the placebo group. Historically, only one other class of medication, ACE (angiotensin-converting-enzyme) inhibitors, such as enalapril or benazepril, has been used to treat dogs in the asymptomatic stage. As a result of the PROTECT study, cardiologists now are recommending Vetmedin with or without an ACE inhibitor and anti-arrhythmic medications, if appropriate, for Dobermans with asymptomatic DCM based on an echocardiogram. Vetmedin currently has not been proved effective in Dobermans with asymptomatic DCM characterized only by arrhythmias; thus, Vetmedin should not be used in dogs with normal echocardiograms. Since the study showed a benefit to starting Vetmedin in Dobermans in the asymptomatic stage of DCM, the ability to identify those dogs has become increasingly important.

The best dog biologists are not people in laboratories like me, but rather, the breeders and owners who have built up decades of insights through their experiences,” Neff says. “That is why their participation in studies such as these is so critical. Developing genetic tests that can be used by breeders to guide their breeding decisions is the end game of our research.”
Purina ONE beyond brand dog food, the super-premium natural food plus vitamins and minerals introduced in 2011, now includes Weight Circles on the packaging. Starting in January 2013, Purina Pro Club will no longer accept UPC codes for Purina Point credit. Purina ONE beyond has a value of 11 points per pound, the same as other Purina ONE products. The Purina ONE beyond portfolio includes: Chicken & Whole Oat Meal Recipe, with real white meat chicken as the No. 1 ingredient and accented with carrots, tomatoes and apples, and Lamb & Whole Barley Recipe, with real lamb as the No. 1 ingredient and accented with blueberries, sweet potatoes and spinach. Both have a 26 percent protein to 17 percent fat ratio and are made without corn or wheat, added fillers or artificial preservatives. They offer complete and balanced nutrition for adult dogs.

Pro Club Dog Food Checks Change to Match New Packaging Sizes

One of the benefits of being a member of Purina Pro Club is receiving dog food checks to offset the costs of Purina brand dog food. The $7 dog food checks now can be used toward the purchase of any 14-pound or larger bag of Purina brand dog food. New packaging sizes for Purina brand dog foods prompted the change.

Purina Points accrue when members submit Weight Circles, the colored circles on packages of Purina brand dog food. Weight Circle submissions are processed as Purina Points that can be redeemed for items from the Pro Club member rewards brochure, online at www.purinaproclub.com, or for Purina dog food checks. Members should submit a minimum of 250 pounds worth of Weight Circles in one submission.

Pro Club members may order any quantity of checks in multiples of 10 checks, using their Purina Points. A set of 10 Purina brand dog food checks can be ordered for 7,000 Purina Points.

A limit of one check can be used per bag. Members should allow three to five weeks for processing and delivery of checks.

How to Reach Purina Pro Club
To view your Purina Point balance, Pro Club members should visit www.purinaproclub.com or call 1-877-PRO-CLUB (1-877-776-2582) between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. Central time Monday through Friday.

Purina dog food checks expire in one year and cannot be reissued. Members should protect dog food checks like cash. Purina is not responsible for replacement in the event of loss, theft or destruction after issuance.

When submitting Weight Circles, Pro Club recommends that you mail them by certified first-class mail or other traceable delivery method. This helps to ensure proof of delivery in the event Pro Club does not receive your Weight Circles. Pro Club is not responsible for Weight Circles not in its possession.

Reminders from Pro Club
Pro Club members should be aware of the following:

• Purina Pro Club is not a program for institutional organizations, such as rescue groups, humane societies or animal shelters.

• Any retail sale or purchase — including Internet transactions — of Purina and Pro Club Pro Club materials is a violation of program terms and conditions. This includes, but is not limited to, the selling or buying of Puppy Starter Kits and weight circles.

• Pro Club is not responsible for fraudulent weight circles. Submitting fraudulent weight circles is a violation of the Pro Club program terms and conditions.

• Purina reserves the right to terminate membership or remove or disqualify earnings for any violation of account terms or program terms.

11th Annual National Dog Show Will Be Broadcast on Thanksgiving Day

The National Dog Show Presented by Purina, hosted by the Kennel Club of Philadelphia, will be broadcast on NBC from noon to 2 p.m. Central time on Thanksgiving, Nov. 22, following the "Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade.”

In its 11th year, The National Dog Show, which features Group and Best in Show judging, has become an American Thanksgiving Day tradition with about 20 million people tuning in. Co-hosts John O’Hurley, of “Seinfeld” and “Dancing with the Stars” fame, and David Frei, of the Westminster Kennel Club and an expert analyst, have provided commentary since the program began in 2002.

Helld at the Greater Philadelphia Expo Center at Oaks, The National Dog Show is filmed during the Saturday, Nov. 17 Kennel Club of Philadelphia Dog Show. Judging Best in Show is Vicki L. Abbott of McKinney, Texas. One of only five bench dog shows held in this country, the Kennel Club of Philadelphia and its predecessor clubs have presented dog shows since 1879. Today, the show draws more than 4,000 entries on Saturday and Sunday and more than 100,000 spectators.

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* This table lists some, but not all, upcoming Purina-sponsored dog shows.
Westminster Best in Show Dogs Remembered for their Achievements, Ambassador Roles

The recent passing of three Westminster Kennel Club Best in Show winners has left a void in the hearts of their owners and dog enthusiasts around the world. “J.R.,” “Stump” and “Rufus” will be remembered for the records they set but also for how they endeared all who knew them.

Owner-handler Scott Sommer of Houston lost his beloved house dogs, J.R. and Stump, over six days in September. J.R. (CH Special Times Just Right), the Bichon Frise who won the Garden in 2001, died Sept. 20 at 15 years of age. On Sept. 26, Stump (CH Clussexx Three D Grinchy Glee), the Sussex Spaniel who at age 10 became the oldest Westminster winner in 2009, passed away at 13 years of age.

After retiring as show dogs, J.R. and Stump had a daily ritual of taking a 10-minute ride with Sommer to the boarding/show kennel where they lived when they were being campaigned. Stump would get out of the car, walk into the kennel and take his place in the first run — the same that was his when being shown. J.R. liked to sit on a grooming table, where he would bark hello to all who entered.

The top-winning Bichon in breed history, J.R. won the Garden as a 3-year-old. Sommer continued to show the Bichon at select shows, and J.R. captured his 101st show at the first AKC National Championship. Best known for his bouncy, energetic temperament, J.R. also had a calm, empathetic side that came out when Scott took him to visit patients at children’s hospitals.

Stump, the 2004 Sporting Group winner at the Garden, came out of retirement to win Westminster, his 51st Best in Show and a first for the rare English breed. Though Stump was entered for Westminster, it was not until the Wednesday before that Sommer decided to bring him due to concerns that he was older and would have to fly in the cargo section because he was too large to meet the size requirement to fit under the seat. On the return trip from New York, Stump flew first class with Sommer.

Barbara and Tom Bishop of Holmdel, N.J., lost their beloved Rufus (CH Rocky Top’s Sundance Kid), the 2006 Westminster winner, Aug. 9 at 12 years of age. The first Colored Bull Terrier to win the Garden, Rufus accumulated 35 Bests in Show, including “The National Dog Show Presented by Purina” and the Morris and Essex Top’s Sundance Kid), the 2006 Westminster winner, Aug. 9 at 12 years of age. The first Colored Bull Terrier to win the Garden, Rufus accumulated 35 Bests in Show, including “The National Dog Show Presented by Purina” and the Morris and Essex

Kennel Club Dog Show. A dynamic show dog and the most successful Colored Bull Terrier of all time, Rufus went on to become a therapy dog and breed ambassador.

Preceding the passing of these Westminster champions, “James” (CH Felicity’s Diamond Jim), the English Springer Spaniel who won the Garden in 2007, died in May 2011 at 11 years old. Owned by Teresa and Allen Patton of Fairfax Station, Va., and handled by Kellie Fitzgerald of Bear, Del., James later visited children at cancer centers and Ronald McDonald houses with Teresa Patton. He became the only canine celebrity to be recognized by the Alzheimer’s Association as a Champion for Alzheimer Awareness.

J.R., Stump, Rufus and James, along with “Uno,” the Beagle and “Sadie,” the Scottish Terrier, helped christen the Purina Event Center at Purina Farms in Gray Summit, Mo., in August 2010. Along with their owners and handlers, these Westminster Best in Show winners walked the red carpet and were the first dogs to enter the facility. Their names are engraved on brick pavers lining the Walk of Champions going into the building.

Purina joins the owners of these special dogs in commemorating their lives. Their accomplishments and their shining personalities will be remembered for many years to come.

Purina-Sponsored Sporting Events* | November to December 2012

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