



Managing Heartworm Disease

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Heartworm season is upon us. But hopefully with all the preventative measures today, a heartworm positive dog is a rare occurrence in your hospital. So when you finally get that case, how do you proceed? I will keep this short and simple.

The American Heartworm Society Guidelines are your best friend. They have resources for your clients as well as for veterinarians and staff. The guidelines will walk you through all aspects of heartworm disease including prevention, diagnosis, staging and management. The guidelines are easy to reference and follow. The AHS now even offers a free APP to customize treatment plans for your patients.

When you do encounter a heartworm positive dog keep in mind that radiology and echocardiography can be helpful in the diagnosis and staging of heartworm disease. Radiographic changes include tortuous, dilated pulmonary arteries and variable degrees of pulmonary parenchymal disease. In more severe cases, evidence of right sided heart enlargement will be present - remember the reverse "D" sign on your v/d projection? You will also see increased sternal contact and loss of the cranial cardiac waist on your lateral projection. Echocardiography can provide a definitive diagnosis of this condition. Heartworms appear as hyperechoic "equal" signs starting in the pulmonary branches and backing up into the main pulmonary artery and eventually, in high worm burdens, into the right heart and across the tricuspid valve leaflets. These dogs will often have hemoglobinuria which confirms a diagnosis of caval syndrome. They also commonly have a right sided heart murmur. Echocardiography can help determine if manual extraction may be of benefit for the patient. Although extremely helpful in some cases, it is not a particularly sensitive method for detecting heartworm disease as low worm burdens will not necessarily be evident.

All this information and more can be found on the American Heartworm Society website. So visit <https://www.heartwormsociety.org> for all your heartworm questions and reference materials for your staff and clients.

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