

What We Can Learn From It & What We Can Do



Maltese



Biewer Terrier



Pug



Shih Tzu



Lhasa Apso



Japanese Chin



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Recently, the Netherlands government decided to ban the breeding or ownership of brachycephalic (BCY) dogs as listed in Table 1. Included is the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel (CKCS). The ban includes both pure and cross bred dogs.

The Dutch claim that BCY dogs are 'suffering' primarily due to respiratory issues. Many animal rights groups also advocate that breeding these canines contributes to the population of 'sick' animals.

"It is not reasonable to label an entire breed as "unhealthy" based upon the extreme anatomical variations of a select population of canines which may or may not represent the breed standard. Most importantly, not all dogs with presumed BCY features will progress to BOAS."

FLAWED CRITERIA FOR MEASUREMENTS?

Critical to the Dutch decision is what criterion was used to define brachycephaly (BCY). The physical characteristics of a short skull, flat-faced face and short muzzle suggests but does not define BCY. Others characterize BCY by using external measurements of skull width-to-length ratios. Using the Cephalic Index (CI), the measured skull width is divided by the skull length and multiplied by 100. A CI value of 80 percent or greater suggests BCY however; this is a crude measurement recognized for inaccuracies and does not alone diagnose BCY.

Using external features to classify a breed as BCY is inaccurate because of wide variations in skull to muzzle lengths of individual dogs. When comparing individual Cavaliers, much variation exists in skull anatomy, muzzle length and snout features. The breed standard states that the muzzle length of a Cavalier is about "1.5 inches long that tapers towards the end". Cavaliers are not a flat-faced breed. Cavaliers do not meet the criterion as a BCY breed.

OBSTRUCTIVE AIRWAY SYNDROME

The real concern is that a 'flat faced or short muzzled' dog may progress to brachycephalic obstructive airway syn-

drome (BOAS). The clinical signs and symptoms are listed in the Table below. BOAS results from a constellation of anatomical features including stenotic or narrowed nostrils, thickened tongue, high arched palate, increased thickness of the soft palate, reduced nasopharyngeal aperture, everted laryngeal saccules, or excessive narrowing of the tracheal aperture and/or tracheal obstruction.

CLINICAL SIGNS

The suggestion of BCY depends upon the presence of clinical signs and symptoms of a disrupted sleep respiratory cycle. BOAS increases the work of breathing particularly during sleep. Severe BOAS results in sleep apnea, pulmonary hypertension and right-sided heart failure. Independent of facial or skull anatomy, obesity and advanced age are common causes of BOAS.

Craniopharyngeal Veterinarian Surgeons employ advanced tests such as nasopharyngeal endoscopy, x-rays, CT or MRI of the head, neck and posterior pharyngeal to diagnosis and to stage the degree of BOAS.

Labeling an entire breed as unhealthy based upon anatomical features of a select population of dogs comprising the breed is not sound. It is not reasonable to label an entire breed as "unhealthy" based upon

the extreme anatomical variations of a select population of canines which may or may not represent the breed standard. Most importantly not all dogs with presumed BCY features will progress to BOAS. The published literature confirms that Cavaliers typically do not suffer or succumb to BOAS.

THE NEED FOR TRANSPARENCY

The Netherlands decision is an example of where external anatomical features are erroneously assumed to progress to a lethal outcome. This illogical reasoning is not substantiated by the present medical literature.

Our breed has sustained many assaults worldwide as an unhealthy breed. As responsible Cavalier breeders, we must educate the public concerning the unfounded criticisms of our breed. Additionally, any ongoing programs or "works in progress" by breed clubs to study Cavalier health should be shared with the public. Our silence allows animal rights groups to villainize breeders and succeed in their objective to eradicate the breeding and ownership of dogs.



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Clinical Signs & Symptoms of BOAS in Brachycephalic dogs

Noisy breathing – snoring, snorting, wheezing (often present or worse during sleep)

Difficulty breathing with exercise or exposure to hot or humid weather/environment

Labored breathing or open-mouth breathing

Exercise intolerance

Gagging or retching; digestive problems

Collapse or fainting; Cyanotic or blue gums; Bleeding gums

Apnea or episodes of interruptive breathing during sleep