

Pure Dog Talk 406 – Scary Weird Stuff that Happens to Girl Dogs

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Laura Reeves:

Welcome to Pure Dog Talk. I am your host, Laura Reeves and I have with us again one of my very, very favorite returning guests of all time, Dr. Marty Greer and we just decided that what we're talking about today is called scary weird stuff that happens to girl dogs. We're laughing because it's a funny name but it is a very fraught subject and it is a very scary subject and it's prompted by a listener who just went through a scary situation. Welcome, Marty. Thank you for being here to help us work through some of this stuff.

Dr. Marty Greer:

I always love being here. Thanks for inviting me.

Laura Reeves:

On our list, prolapsed uterus, vaginal hyperplasia, inguinal hernia with a uterus in it, which is just boggling my mind, torsioned uterine horn, ovarian tumor and spay or don't spay during a C-section. That's a lot of stuff. So can we start with the prolapsed uterus? Talk about what that is, what that looks like, what might cause it and what we do about it.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Sure, I think that's a great place to start. So there's uterine prolapses and there's vaginal prolapse or vaginal hyperplasia and probably vaginal hyperplasias a more appropriate term for the vaginal prolapse. A uterine prolapse is really rare in dogs. We see it a little bit more commonly in cats, still not common. Really common in dairy cows. Saw them all the time in dairy cows. The uterine prolapse literally means that the uterus turns inside out like you pull a sock inside out and the uterus passes through the vagina. Now of course it's still attached by the ovaries and the blood vessels that run to the ovaries and the ligaments and all the things that go with that but the exposure of the lining of the uterus then, is protruding out through the vaginal lips and it's disturbing. Like I said, I've never seen it in a dog. It's reported every now and then.

Laura Reeves:

I actually have when I was a kid. It is disturbing. I'm going to go with disturbing.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah.

Laura Reeves:

"Mom, there's something wrong with this dog."

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah. To say the least. It's not common in dogs. Like I said, I've never seen it in a dog but I've seen it in cats and it's challenging because usually the bladder's inside the uterus and then they can't urinate and of course it's an outdoor cat, it's a barn cat, it's something that isn't in and out of the house and so they come in and they've got this really awful mass because their bladder is huge and the uterus is exposed and it's frequently after kittens have been born or in the case of a dog, puppies have been born and almost always in dairy cows, well it happens in beef cows, too. I don't want to discriminate here. It happens in all cows but it usually happens after calving that they push the calf out and then they merrily go on their way and they push the uterus out, as well. I have never personally replaced a cow's uterus but my husband was a dairy practitioner for 23 years so this was regular farm call that he was called out on and probably his least favorite farm call because usually by the time they had got out there it had been out for a while and the cow was in trouble and the farmer had been trying for a while and so it's a bit on the messy side because they don't usually take them to surgery and spay them.

Although you can. My daughter came into the office one night, we were doing a C-section on a dog and she'd been out on farm calls with my husband and she was probably about 11 or 12 years old and so she's watching this C-section and there's blood associated with that and then she'd just been out on the farm call where she held one end of the board, because you put a board between the farmer and the kid to hold the uterus up so that a husband can stuff it back in. She comes into the office and she's like, "So mom," she says, "These are all these girl things." She says, "I'm never having children." She was almost right. She was 34 before she had her first child. I think we had some serious emotional impact on this kid because of all the uterus things that she saw.

Laura Reeves:

Oh my gosh, yeah.

Dr. Marty Greer:

As a child.

Laura Reeves:

Maybe that's my excuse. That's why I never had kids. Oh my gosh. Do we have any inclination as to what may cause this to happen? Either the prolapsed uterus or the vaginal hyperplasia where you've got a body part outside of the body where it doesn't belong?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Sure. A uterine prolapse is just a unfortunate random event, sort of I don't think there's an explanation for it. Vaginal hyperplasia there's definitely a breed and a family predilection to it. Commonly see it in the brachycephalics, of course it's one more thing to put on the list of what Pugs, Bull Mastiffs, French Bulldogs, all the short faced dogs have a increased risk of vaginal hyperplasia although I have seen in a family of Chesapeake Bay Retrievers and you can see it in almost any breed, it's just more common in the brachycephalics. To be really honest, it has a familial or a genetic predisposition to it so unfortunately this is something that probably could be better managed if people would stop breeding their dogs but the line of Chesapeakes that I saw were otherwise fabulous enough dogs that they wanted to perpetuate the genetics so we got to continually see dogs with vaginal hyperplasia.

It's not serious from the perspective of dogs don't die from it but it's smelly and it's icky and stuff sticks to the vaginal tissues that are exposed and they can be a little tricky to correct. I was reading something last night about it and they're like, "Oh this is really easy to fix." Well it's not that easy to fix. It can be fixed, you have to be careful that you don't involve the urethra so if the dog can't urinate after the surgery I do some of them with just a local anesthetic and it doesn't seem to be especially problematic to the dog but it's a little bit tedious to place all the sutures that you need to place and then remove the tissue you need to remove and all those things.

Usually we see it when the bitches are in heat or close to standing heat and that's most frequently when we see it but some of those dogs and even some dogs that didn't have it at that point will have it at the time the progesterone drops again at the time of whelping. If it happens at whelping there's pretty much no decision, it's a C-section. If it happens at breeding you may want to consider spaying or although I tend to be conservative on spaying and I try not to spay when they're in heat for a lot of reasons-

Laura Reeves:

That we're going to get to.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right but typically associated with being in heat. That's when we see it. But the progesterone on its way up and then when it drops back down again occasionally we'll see it at that point.

Laura Reeves:

Okay and so talk to me about, I'm having a hard time even envisioning this, an inguinal hernia where the uterus is involved in the hernia.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah and that's really unfortunate. The first one I saw I was a brand new baby graduate. I was trying to spay a Coonhound that had this swelling in her inguinal region or in the groin. I took her to surgery and her uterus had slid down into the hernia and had been in there for an extended period of time so it was adhered into it and my surgical skills at that point were still fairly youthful and in spite of that the dog survived but it was not an easy surgery for the dog or for me. I was a little scarred after that, not only was the dog. So it can be a little bit tricky because of the adhesions but I've since seen it in two bitches that were pregnant. One of them was a former employee of mine. She came in with her dog, a little Dachshund and she said, I'd worked for this other vet at this point and so she said, "I took her in yesterday and had her ultra sounded and they said she wasn't pregnant. But I kind of feel like she is." Well she's a little Dachshund so I got down on my knees and I looked up at the former employee, she looked at me and said, "Oh no."

Apparently I had gave it away because I could feel that the uterus wasn't in the abdomen but was rather subcutaneous, outside the abdomen. And I've since heard of that in another Dachshund so it may, again, have a familial relationship there.

Laura Reeves:

Wow so is this a case where a puppy had, like a juvenile hernia, it was bigger than the index finger, they didn't fix it and then things just came out? Is that what we're talking about?

Dr. Marty Greer:

She was unaware that the dog had a hernia until that day. So I don't know if that was the case or not because she hadn't been previous diagnosed with it. But once we diagnosed her I sent her to see a surgeon, I actually called the vet school and they told me if I sent her that that they only treatment she would receive was a spay. So I took her to a different surgeon and the surgeon, who's brilliant, was able to replace the uterus into her abdomen, saved the pregnancy and of course we did a C-section for her because we didn't want her-

Laura Reeves:

Well yeah.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Pushing puppies out on a recently repaired inguinal hernia because we were afraid that it might open again. But she went on to produce puppies of her own or grand puppies of her own that had no inguinal hernias. She's a champion Dachshund and continued to show her and she did not produce dogs with that. I don't believe the other Dachshund that was equally affected was from her lines. It was, I believe, a different line of dogs. But there probably is a familial tendency for that to happen, as well.

Laura Reeves:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dr. Marty Greer:

People need to be aware of it.

Laura Reeves:

So if you have a hernia in your baby puppy and it's bigger than the end of your pinky, get it fixed? That's what I'm saying.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah and what a lot of people don't realize and their veterinarians should know but don't always know is that even if you can only feel a hernia on one side, both sides need to be fixed. While she's under or he's under then it should be repaired at the same time. I just fixed an inguinal hernia about a year ago on a Coonhound puppy that had dropped about two feet of intestines into his scrotal sack so it was pretty cool because the-

Laura Reeves:

You're going with, "Cool." I'm going with, "Not cool."

Dr. Marty Greer:

It's cool from a surgical perspective because I took really nice video watching it disappear. So we opened up his belly and then pulled his intestines in and then fixed his hernia. So it happens in males and females but of course the males, we don't have to worry about their uterus falling down in there but we do have to worry about other organs falling down into the hernia.

Laura Reeves:

Yeah.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It's cool if you're the surgeon. It's not cool if you're the dog.

Laura Reeves:

If you're the surgeon and you're getting to see the fascinating things that the body can do. Oh my gosh.

Dr. Marty Greer:

And survive.

Laura Reeves:

Yeah I had a Pug that got sort of strongly held by her pointer, I'm being really politically correct here. Externally there was not a hole to be seen on this Pug but the Pug had been bugging the wire hair and bugging the wire hair and bugging the wire hair and the wire hair said, "You know, I'm over it." He just held him real firmly. Well apparently he held him so firmly he popped his guts into his testicles. I mean literally- So it happens. There's another one, I can check that box. Cool. Yeah. Excellent.

Hang tight, guys. Got a little bit of information for you. We'll be right back to the podcast in a minute.

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Laura Reeves:

So another box checking opportunity, torsioned uterine horn.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah.

Laura Reeves:

Usually in my case, my bitch was pregnant and due to whelp or in whelp actually and whelped the first couple puppies, got hung up and got her up and took a look at her at the vet and they're like, "Yeah, no, this is a problem."

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah and the problem is it's difficult to diagnose those until you're in the surgical procedure. There's not anything we can really tell on x-ray or ultrasound that can look at why the bitch is not progressing other than to say, "You know what? She's had all the right things line up and it's just not going well so we need to go to surgery." This is why you don't want to wait forever. When those bitches stop producing puppies you need to get some veterinary care. Now I've seen a lot of uterine horns that have flipped into an unfortunate position and don't have the ability for a puppy to pass through but I've never seen one that actually lost the blood supply to it and was devitalized and had to be removed. It is relatively common. I think we probably see one every couple months here but we do 200 C-sections a year so we're not seeing an average caseload in our practice.

Laura Reeves:

Right.

Dr. Marty Greer:

But we also had one dog, this is like the yucky story day, one dog that had a normal uterine horn on one side of her C-section. On the other side had aplasia.

So in other words the uterine horn didn't connect from the ovary down to the cervix, it ended in a blind pouch and it ended up with a pyometra in it consecutively with the pregnancy and the uterine horn.

Laura Reeves:

Ew.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah, it was great. On that particular-

Laura Reeves:

Not great.

Dr. Marty Greer:

We took out the uterine horn and the ovary on the side that was affected and left her with the other uterine horn and she went on to produce another litter of puppies with four in it. Then her daughter went on to produce puppies of 10.

Laura Reeves:

With one ovary and one uterine horn?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah it was a lab. She was fine. They're labs. But her daughter, I did a C-section on her daughter several years later, obviously and she went on to have 10 puppies. Two uterine horns, two ovaries, all the normal equipment.

Laura Reeves:

Right.

Dr. Marty Greer:

That's just one of life's little oddball things that happens and we don't think that that's an inherited disorder so you can see weird things but remember, you can take out one uterine horn and leave the other one. Just because something's not normal-

Laura Reeves:

We just made news on this podcast. 40 years in dogs, who would have thought that you could leave one uterine horn and have a puppy?

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah, no you can. You don't need the whole lot of equipment. You only need half of it.

Laura Reeves:

Wow. Things that you should know, listeners.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Well you know, nature gave us duplications of almost everything in our bodies and there's a reason for that. You have one liver, you have one heart but you've got two ovaries and two kidneys and two uterine horns and guys have two testicles-

Laura Reeves:

Two lungs.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah, two lungs, five lobes, it's all duplicated for a reason because then you have a reserve. Nature has provided, or God depending on what your beliefs are, we have been provided with reserves so take advantage of that and think on your feet, use your head. If your veterinarian decides at some strange hour of the day that you have a crisis, think about what your alternatives are.

Laura Reeves:

That is fascinating. Okay I'm just saying, that is fascinating. Now, we talk a lot about spay and neuter, early spay and neuter. What can happen, what can't happen. Ovarian tumors, so again scary weird girl dog stuff, you say not very common?

Dr. Marty Greer:

No, not common. Even though most of the dogs that a lot of practices see are spayed and neutered, we see a lot of intact dogs in our practice and it is not common to see ovarian tumors or uterine tumors. I diagnosed one uterine tumor and of course it was my daughter's Bernese Mountain Dog.

Laura Reeves:

Of course.

Dr. Marty Greer:

She had lymphoma, which she did pass away from the lymphoma, it metastasized fairly quickly and she was gone. But that's the only time I've ever seen a tumor in the uterus. Of course, it's your kid's dog, right?

Laura Reeves:

Right.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Ovarian tumors are not common and there's probably more of them than we recognize. First of all you're not going to see them when dogs are spayed when they're young because of course that just isn't common. When I spayed a Bernese Mountain Dog last week, because she had had a history of infertility and was never pregnant so we finally said, "Okay, well out this equipment goes before she ends up with a pyo," because Bernese Mountain Dogs, 46% of them that aren't spayed end up with pyometras.

Laura Reeves:

Right.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Which is a whole nother discussion and sent her whole reproductive tract in because of her history of infertility and found that both ovaries had the same tumor in it. They didn't look like they were serious and they were completely excised and everything is fine but nevertheless, you can see ovarian tumors and I think I've probably only ever seen one dog die from an ovarian tumor. And that's in many, many, many, many years of practice. With most of our dogs being intact in our practice.

Laura Reeves:

Right.

Dr. Marty Greer:

We have a seven doctor practice, we're not a little practice. We're a decent sized practice where most of the dogs are not spayed or neutered because of the reproduction.

Laura Reeves:

Right.

Dr. Marty Greer:

We've seen a lot of ovaries over the years and I've seen maybe one dog die from it.

Laura Reeves:

Interesting. Very, very interesting. Well and we've talked and we'll link to it in previous podcasts about why we do not do early spay and neuter. We've already talked about that and we'll make sure we have a link to it but the other one that I think is interesting that comes into play, you and I were talking about it off air, the question and I went through this, I'm living experience of what can go wrong but why or why not we spay a bitch if we are in the middle of a C-section.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah and this is one of those things that I am very passionate about and I used to do spays on dogs at C-sections. We would ask clients if the C-section, "Are you thinking that you might not breed her again?"

Laura Reeves:

Right.

Dr. Marty Greer:

"Do you want us to spay her at the time?" So I used to be one of those doctors that did this but I learned over the years that that was an unfortunate practice and I, in fact, got passionate enough about it after one of my clients was treated in what I considered to be inappropriately at a referral center that I wrote a five page document which I will share with your readers. I'm just pulling it up here. It really is five pages long. It goes through the reasons that you should not spay at C-section, the primary reason is that one third of her blood volume will go into the trash can along with her uterus if you take her uterus out at the time of the C-section. That's because there's such a huge amount of blood flow to the uterus at that time, which one would expect and the surgeons are kind of cavalier about it. They're like, "Yeah, well, what's the big deal?" Well it's 30% of her blood volume, folks. That's a big deal. She's already anemic, all bitches are anemic when they go into labor for their C-section.

I do pre-op blood work on all of them so I have seen thousands and thousands and thousands of pre-op blood work on dogs that are pregnant. They're always anemic because of the expansion of blood volume, just like it is on the human side when you're pregnant you're almost always anemic. When you take away one third of the blood volume of a dog that's already anemic then you've really probably depleted her by 50%. If you want to pay for a transfusion and you want to have the risk of a transfusion reaction and all the things that go with it, merrily go on your way but unless the uterus is flat out black and it's going to kill her to leave it in, you should leave the uterus in and then come back at a later time when the uterus is the size of your finger instead of the size of your arm. Then you can take it out. Now I've had also the occasion where on occasion, not very often, we've had clients that have said, "I really can't afford to do another procedure. This was an accidental breeding. I have the male, I have the female. It's going to happen again. I'll be back in six months, I'll end up with another C-section. Are you sure you won't spay her? Please, please, please spay her for me. I can't afford another surgery."

At which point, I will do a tubal ligation. Now that is not my preferred method of birth control but you can either do a tubal ligation or take her ovaries and still leave her uterus so that she can't get pregnant. It doesn't reduce the risk of pyometra which is why it is not a favorite procedure on the veterinary side. They just don't recommend that you do it but when push comes to shove and it's 10:00 at night and you don't want to end up with an anemic dog that's dying of low blood volume and low blood pressure and she has a litter of puppies to raise, I don't want to be that doctor that makes a decision that's life altering or life shorting about that dog so it's really easy to do a tubal ligation. The ovary ducts are very visible at the C-section, it's simple to do, you put a couple ligatures on, take out the middle section or if you must, take the ovaries because dogs don't need their ovaries to lactate. We know that but I just really think that it's critical that people are informed with this information and that's why I'm going to share this article with you that I wrote.

I did share it with some of the theriogenologists and some of the ER docs so it has been reviewed and the emergency room doctors don't like it, the theriogenologists love it.

Laura Reeves:

Right.

Dr. Marty Greer:

It depends on where you stand when you look at this issue but I personally am not going to kill a dog because I did a spay at a C-section. That's just not in my wheelhouse.

Laura Reeves:

Right. Well like I said, I had a bitch with a torsioned uterine horn that I said, "Okay we're going to go ahead and spay it." It was her last litter and we almost lost her. She almost bled out and in the hurry of trying to save her life, my veterinarian, who was an excellent surgeon, did a great job but nothing against him at all, somehow there was some small piece of ovary that got missed and she came in season until she died at 15.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Yeah.

Laura Reeves:

Every year, every eight months there she was.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Sure.

Laura Reeves:

The first time it happened I called up one of my best friends who's a veterinarian and I said, "Are you kidding me? How is this possible?"

Dr. Marty Greer:

It's a very difficult time to do a spay and do a good job and I've seen ligatures slip because the blood volume that flows to the uterus at that point, instead of the blood vessels being little tiny ones they're the size of your little finger so they're bigger, they're harder to ligate. So there's a lot of risks that go with it and it's just not a great option. Now if the uterus is bleeding and this did happen to one of my clients when her dog was in a C-section in another part of the country, they really couldn't get the bleeding to stop so you can inject oxytocin directly into the uterus at the surgical procedure, now this is something your vet would do. This is not an owner do it yourself at home kind of kit.

Laura Reeves:

Right. Do not try this at home. Got it.

Dr. Marty Greer:

If your vet's standing in the surgery room and they can't get the uterus to stop bleeding and they're like, "Well I think we have to spay her," you have two choices at that point besides spaying her. One is to inject oxytocin directly into the muscle of the uterus because it's going to give a really nice local effect of contracting it down and cutting down on the bleeding. The other alternative is there are things like gels that you can put into body cavities and body tissues to stop the bleeding. They're intended to be blood clotting aides. They come as a sheet, they come as a powder, they come in different forms. Those can also be used in the uterus and they will disintegrate and not leave behind any residue. That's another option for people to utilize if they're in a panic and they're trying to figure out what they can do to save their bitch and save their litter.

Those are things that veterinarians need to kind of brush up on a little bit in advance or if you're the owner, be aware. Have this article in your hand, be prepared.

Laura Reeves:

Advocate for your dog. I say this all the time. You have to advocate for your dog just like you have to advocate for yourself with medical professionals and I mean, you and I have talked before. No veterinarian likes a client that comes in and says, "You have to do it this way."

Dr. Marty Greer:

Exactly.

Laura Reeves:

It's about that conversation.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right and it's the relationship you have and it's being prepared and knowing all your ducks are in a row but having the information you need in advance so that you don't end up with this last minute thing. There's a fabulous book and it is not veterinary, it's human, but as long as you've mentioned it it's called How Doctors Think. It's written by Jerome Groopman. He's a physician and it sounds like it's a book written for doctors but it's really a book written for patients or their patient advocates. I have probably given away 20 copies of it. I've read it twice and every time I am reading it someone comes in that I think needs a copy so I hand it to them and they leave with it and so I buy another one because I think it's important but it talks about patient advocacy and how medical mistakes happen and it happens on the veterinary side as well as on the human side. It gives you insights into how things work in the medical field and some ammunition so that you can help to communicate better with your healthcare provider, whether it's yours or that of a family member or friend. You've got the ammunition you need to communicate.

I think it's a book that everyone, I don't care who you are, if you go to the doctor or know anyone that goes to the doctor, which is pretty much everybody, I think you all need to have a copy and read it. So Dr. Groopman is, I've never met him, it's a fabulous book.

Laura Reeves:

Awesome. Well and having been through both my parents have passed away, and patient advocacy is a thing but I think it is a thing for your dog, too.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Right and they can't advocate for themselves.

Laura Reeves:

No, exactly.

Dr. Marty Greer:

And sometimes the veterinarian will and that's not an easy position to be in as a veterinarian. Sometimes I have to look at a client and say, "This is really not okay for your dog or your cat to go through. This is really what we need to do." Because people are paralyzed, they can't always make a good decision.

Laura Reeves:

Right.

Dr. Marty Greer:

I try not to be that paternalistic veterinarian that walks in the room and dictates things but sometimes you just have to take a stand and say, "This is not what's best for your pet," and people tend to appreciate that but not in the moment.

Laura Reeves:

Yeah, absolutely. All right well scary things that can happen to our girl dogs and I'm a little terrified by the number of them that I've personally lived through and seen in 40 years. Oh lordy.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Understandably, yes. But it does give you a perspective and sometimes you wonder how this can all go wrong and then other times you look at it and say, "How can so many things go right?"

Laura Reeves:

Yeah.

Dr. Marty Greer:

There are so many physiological and anatomical things that can go wrong. It is something of a miracle that your heart beats every beat it's supposed to.

Laura Reeves:

Exactly.

Dr. Marty Greer:

And that you take every breath you're supposed to and all the other things happen that just miraculously get us alive and keep us alive. Life is truly precious and I think sometimes we take too many things for granted.

Laura Reeves:

You know, a little profound moment at the end of the veterinary voice, I think that that is absolutely true, Marty. Thank you so much, my dear. I will talk to you again soon.

Dr. Marty Greer:

Thank you.

As always, if you have any questions or input we'd love to hear from you. The show notes and links to resources on today's topic are available at puredogtalk.com. Drop us a note in the comments or email to Laura at [puredogtalk.com](mailto:laura@puredogtalk.com). Remember guys, this podcast is for you so if you want to know something, give me a holler. We'll do a podcast for you. If you wouldn't mind, you could help me out here. Take a couple minutes to visit iTunes and give us a review. The Dog Show Superintendents Association is a proud supporter of Pure Dog Talk. Our Dog Show Superintendents are the hardworking people who make the dog show function. They are advocates for education and mentorship in the purebred dog fancy. So stop by the super's desk at your next show, tell them how much you love Pure Dog Talk and give them a shout out for their support. That's all for today, thank you for joining us on True Dog Talk.