

Aetiology And Outcome In 1440 Dyspnoeic Cats Presented To First-Opinion Emergency Clinics (2012-2015)

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INTRODUCTION: While there are numerous studies about specific causes of dyspnoea in cats, only one study of cats with dyspnoea as a presenting sign has been published. In that study of a referral population,¹ 37.7% of cats had cardiac diagnoses, followed by respiratory (32.2%), neoplastic (20.0%) and traumatic (8.9%) conditions. The aim of this study was to describe the population and outcomes of dyspnoeic cats presenting to primary out-of-hours practitioners, and to compare it with previously reported data.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: The Vets Now patient database was queried to retrieve case records of cats with the presenting complaints of 'breathing difficulties with/without coughing' and for which a provisional diagnosis was recorded. The diagnostic code was then used to allocate patients to body systems or categories, namely respiratory, cardiac, neoplasia, trauma, miscellaneous or open. The 'miscellaneous' category included diagnoses that fell within other body systems, such as anaemia, seizures, or intoxications. The 'open' category included patients that had been coded with the VeNom terms of 'condition under investigation' or 'diagnosis not made'. Within each diagnostic category, age, gender, breed and short-term outcome (< 48 h) were analysed. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics.

RESULTS: 1440 case records were retrieved. Of those, 643/1440 (44.7%) cats died or were euthanised, 380/1440 (26.5%) were discharged normally, 400/1440 (27.8%) were transferred to another veterinary practice and 17/1440 (1.2%) were discharged against veterinary advice. 585/1440 (40.6%) patients had a respiratory diagnosis, followed by cardiac (493/1440, 34.2%), neoplasia (84/1440, 5.8%), and trauma (69/1440, 4.8%). 141/1440 (9.8%) of patients had a diagnosis categorised as 'miscellaneous' and 68/1440 (4.7%) had an 'open' diagnosis. The overall mortality rate of cardiac patients was 297/493 (60%) compared to 173/585 (29.6%) in respiratory patients. Male neutered cats accounted for 34% of the patients in both the cardiac and respiratory categories, compared to 15-17% for other genders.

CONCLUSIONS: Respiratory conditions occurred most frequently, but cardiac cases had the highest mortality rate. The distribution of diagnostic categories was similar to those previously reported.

CLINICAL RELEVANCE: This is the first large-scale study of cats presenting with dyspnoea in a first-opinion emergency setting. While there are limitations to this study, the information may be useful to inform first-opinion veterinary practice and will serve as a basis for future studies.

REFERENCES:

1. Swift S, Dukes-McEwan J, Fonfara S et al. Aetiology and outcome in 90 cats presenting with dyspnoea in a referral population. *J Small Anim Pract* 2009;50:466–473.