

"Pemphigus"...Latin for "blister"
Greek for "vesicle"

### WHO:

- ► The most common autoimmune skin disease in dogs, cats, and horses.
- Dogs: Chows, Akitas, Labs, GSD, English bulldogs, Cocker spaniels, Dachshund, Doberman, Collies
- ► ITP-rare but can be seen in dogs with PF
- ► Cats: No breed predisposition
- Dogs and cats: No sex predilection
- Most cases seen at end of summer.



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# Pemphigus foliaceus (PF): What is it? What causes it? Acantholytic cells on cytology Desmocollin-1 (DSC-1) Desmosomes "hold together" keratinocytes in the upper layers of the epidermis. Autoantibodies bind to DSC-1 in the desmosomes (not found in mucous membranes). Binding of DSC-1 causes the formerly under tension keratinocytes to "round up" and form ACANTHOLYTIC CELLS.

What other diseases can cause the formation of acantholytic cells?

Differential diagnoses:

Bacterial pyoderma

Fungal-Trichophyton spp.-no fluorescence with Wood's light!

Leishmaniasis-in areas where endemic

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### Pemphigus-causes of binding to DSC-1?

### Most cases are iatrogenic with no known trigger, but...

- Drugs: Penicillamine, Penicillin, Cephalosporins, Enalapril, Cimetidine, Doxycycline, Amox/Clav acid, Ampicillin, Sulfas, Itraconazole, Lime sulfur, Vaccines, Allopurinol.
- Former spot-on's-ProMeris, Vectra 3D, Certifect
- Human Ketoconazole 2% shampoo in 1 study caused PF in a dog.
- Drugs can activate proteolytic enzymes in the skin that disrupt desmosomes—acantholysis.

### Also:

Foods such as garlic/onions.
Infections can trigger PF in humans.
Paraneoplastic pemphigus: thymoma
UV light
Genetics

# Probable drug-triggered PF in a dog following NexGard administration

- 9yr old miniature dachshund with chronic pustular dermatitis, fever, weight loss.
- Occurred within days of administering NexGard, worse with each 5 subsequent doses.
- Biopsy confirmed PF
- Treated w/ prednisone and cyclosporine but low doses were required for maintenance.
- ▶ White A, et al. Vet Record (7)2, June, 2019.

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# Appearance of PF lesions-crusts, erosions photos courtesy Dr. Jocelyn Wellington The provided HTML of the provi

### Pemphigus foliaceus--DOGS

- Median age of onset: 5 years
- ► Incidence: 3 cases/1000 dogs/year
- Most lesions first appear symmetrically on face-dorsal muzzle, concave pinnae.
- 66% of dogs will have generalized lesions with 35% having footpad lesions in addition.
- Facial lesions only in 16% of dogs.
- If truncal lesions only-need to rule out bacterial pyoderma.



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### Pemphigus foliaceus: Dogs-other stuff

- ▶ Fever, lethargy
- Variable pruritus
- Mild anemia
- Leukocytosis
- Non responsive to antibiotic therapyespecially consider antibiotic therapy in truncal lesions.
- Breed predisposition and littermate occurrence suggest genetics in dogs.
- Photo courtesy of Dr. Jocelyn Wellington



### Pemphigus foliaceus (PF)-diagnosis Be sure to make the diagnosis!

- Cytology or biopsy of crustsubcorneal pustule yields acantholytic cells.
- Pustules can be transient! If no crusts present-sample the area covering eroded skin.
- Try and send the pustule and/or crust even if it falls off!
- Do not prep the skin prior to biopsy.
- Biopsy off steroids 3 weeks if possible, let pathologist know if/when any former steroid use.
- Fungal culture to rule out Trichophyton spp. Special stains like PAS or GMS may be negative if fungal hyphae are not captured in the hippsy.
- Complete blood count/serum profile (you'll need it as a baseline before Rxing immunosuppressant meds)
- An ANA is NOT necessary in suspected PF.
- Get a good history of meds, supplements, topicals, vaccines the patient has been taking and for how long prior to emergence of lesions.

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### Pemphigus foliaceus-treatment DOGS No "one size fits all"! What I start with:

- Oral steroids (not injectable-why?)
- Prednisone 1-4mg/kg daily and taper gradually until no new lesions or 80% of existing lesions are "quiet". Extremely variable!
- Rapid onset of action.
- Works by suppressing T cell function, inducing apoptosis, and in some patients, inhibits B cell antibody production.
- Gradually reduce by 25% every 2 weeks.
- If reduce too quickly, every time you go back to pred, it will work less! (tolerance).
- If patient no longer responding on one steroid, may have to switch to another.
- Remember in dogs, steroid-associated gastric ulceration can occur as early as in 14 days with no clinical signs!

- ▶ Other steroid options:
- Methylprednisolone: remember 4mg = 5mg prednisone
- Dexamethasone 0.1-0.2mg/kg once daily
- Triamcinolone acetonide 0.2-0.6 mg/kg once daily.
- Doxycycline 5mg/kg bid with food. Niacinamide 250mg/500mg tid (depends on size of dog)
- Prescription hypoallergenic diet
- Sun avoidance
- ▶ Vitamin E 20iu/kg orally once daily

# Why Tetracycline antibiotics and Niacinamide together?

- Tetracycline (TCN), Doxycycline, Minocycline-all have potential antiinflammatory properties.
- Tetracyclines suppress neutrophil chemotaxis, lymphocyte activation.
- Niacinamide + Tetracyclines together: prevent inflammatory cells from "homing" to site of inflammation.
- Dose: TCN 250mg tid of each together if dog weighs < 10-25kg or 500mg tid of each together if dog weighs >10-25kg.



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# Combine steroid initially with a long term nonsteroidal immunosuppressant

- Azathioprine 1mg/lb. body wt. once daily or every other day (depends on how severe the dog is). Get CBC/profile first.
- Targets cell mediated immunity, interferes with lymphocyte proliferation.
- Takes 2-6 weeks to become effective.
- Watch liver enzymes, leukopenia, thrombocytopenia with Azathioprine and potential for pancreatitis.
- Check CBC/liver enzymes again in 2-3 weeks then again in a month then q 3-6 months.
- Recheck l0-l4 days after starting steroid/Azathioprine regimen. If improving by 80%, start to reduce steroid, get CBC/profile for Azathioprine.
- Recheck again in 2 weeks getting another CBC and gradually reducing the steroid.
- If no improvement in the first 10-14 days, consider changing current steroid (continue Azathioprine) and recheck in 1 week.
- Once off steroids, can slowly reduce Azathioprine to qod or 2-3x/week.

# What about hepatotoxicity and/or myelosuppression with QOD Azathioprine?

- 41 client-owned dogs on glucocorticoids and Azathioprine QOD for a minimum of 2 months
- Dogs were being treated for dermatological conditions.
- Analyzed data from 1994-2020.
   Hepatotoxicity defined as 2x ALT.
- Hepatoxicity when used SID is dosedependent and usually occurs in first 30
- Recommended monitoring for SID dosing: before Rx then q 2 weeks x 2 months, then q 2 months.

- 2/41 dogs had elevated ALT at 18 and 40 days respectively.
- 1 dog: 1.9mg/kg QOD had 4x ALT rise. Another on 2.3mg/kg QOD had a 30x ALT increase.
- In this study, Azathioprine was not associated with thrombocytopenia, neutropenia, anemia. Lymphopenia in 1 dog at 105 days.
- Eberhardy A, et.al. Prevalence of hepatotoxicity and myelosuppression with alternate day use of azathioprine and glucocorticoids for treatment of dermatological conditions in dogs. Vet Derm 2022, 00: 1-8.

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### Nonsteroidal immunosuppressants-DOGS

- Modified Cyclosporine: 5-10mg/kg once daily (higher doses used in PF than atopy).
- Can be effective as monotherapy (when you can't use steroids like in diabetes, pancreatitis). Caution in diabetics-can raise glucose levels.
- Give with food to reduce gi upset.
- Generic produced higher serum levels than brand name in 1 study.
- Can reduce to qod or 2-3x/week as patient improves.
- When used with steroids 9/11 CR in 65 days. 6 dogs went off steroids completely. Chong E, NAVDF Abstract 2022



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- Other nonsteroidal immunosuppressants used in PF-DOGS
- Mycophenolate 20-45mg/kg daily dividedin 1 study (6% of dogs went into remission. Most dogs required accompanying steroid doses. Monitor CBC. Inexpensive, diarrhea-within 10 days. Best to start at 10mg/kg and titrate up (avoids diarrhea)
- Leflunomide 2-4mg/kg once daily-monitor similar to Azathioprine
- Chlorambucil 0.1-0.2mg/kg sid-bid Monitor CBC, expensive for large dogs.
- Bruton's tyrosine kinase inhibitor (Rilzabrutinib)-15mg/kg once daily-all 9 dogs w/ PF showed reduced lesions. In a 3 dog study, NR in 20 weeks.
- Rituximab-anti-CD20 antibody

- Cyclophosphamide 25mg/m2 q 24-48 hours, hemorrhagic cystitis
- IV human immunoglobulin 0.5mg/kg IV over several hours
- Polysulfated glycosaminoglycans (Adequan) 4.4mg/kg SQ 2x/wk. Monitor PT/PTT
- Adipose tissue-derived stem cells mesenchymal + steroid CR for one year in 1 dog.

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# Oclacitinib for PF in dogs-JAK1 inhibition maybe helpful in canine PF

- Oclacitinib 1mg/kg bid, one study of 4 dogs-2 improved by 65% after 1 month, 2 excluded due to neoplasia (fibrosarcoma, skin LSA)
- ► Another study: 3/11 cases-no response, 8/11 good response with 5/8 CR. 3/8 required bid dosing.



- 9 dogs with PF: 0.5mg/kg bid x 14 days. 3/9-no response, 6/9 good response, 5/6 complete resolution (CR). Rapid improvement seen in all the dogs.
- 2/6 required bid maintenance dosing, rest went to once daily.
- ▶ Burton, Walczak WCVD 2020
- Pemphigus can accompany atopy and flare with allergy flare ups.
- Few studies show PF maybe more common in allergic dogs.
- Possible use as first-line therapy pending biopsy results.

# Oclacitinib compared to Azathioprine in management of canine PF

- Which Rx had the best steroidsparing effect and/or use as monotherapy?
- Oclacitinib 0.4-0.6mg/kg bid x 15 dogs
- Azathioprine 1-2mg/kg sid x 15 dogs
- ▶ 13/15 AZ-remission
- ▶ 11/15 OC-remission
- AZ group had 77.7% reduction in original steroid dose.
- ▶ OC group had 69.38% reduction
- Hernandex-Bures, A. NAVDF 2023 resident abstract

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### PF Dog Refractory cases-consider...

- Hypoallergenic diet
- UV light exposure
- Did you fungal culture?
- Did dog develop dermatophytosis, demodicosis, or bacterial pyoderma as result of the steroid?
- Change to different steroid, i.e. from pred to dex, pred to triamcinolone acetonide. No long-acting steroid injection!
- Underlying cancer? i.e. thymoma
- Combine immunosuppressantsIs your diagnosis correct?
- Did you check cytology/biopsy?



PF-Dogs Prognosis

- ► Prognosis in dogs: Fair-to-Good
- CR 50% of dogs, time to remission 4-7 weeks.
- ➤ 52% CR, 35% PR, 13% euthanizedtreatment failure, treatment side effects, poor quality of life.
- Survival >10 months=positive longterm outcome.
- Remember the lesions can wax and wane



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### PF Dogs vs. Cats

### Cats

- Adhesion molecule not known.
- ▶ No age, breed, sex predilection.
- ► Face, ears, nailbeds, nipples
- 97% of cats controlled on prednisolone 2mg/kg/day in 8 weeks.
- Cats more likely to be controlled on low dose steroid as monotherapy.
- ▶ Prognosis: good

### Dogs

- DSC-1 attacked by autoantibodies
- Some breeds affected more than others i.e. Akita, Chow.
- ► Face, pinnae, trunk, footpads
- 38% of dogs controlled on prednisone 1.5mg/kg/day as monotherapy.
- ▶ 4/5 dogs CR on pred/cyclosporine
- Prognosis: fair

# Pemphigus Foliaceus (PF) in cats

Before treatment



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After treatment



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### Pemphigus foliaceus in cats

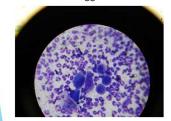
### WHO:

- The most common autoimmune skin disease of cats.
   Incidence 1 case/100 cats/year with
- Incidence 1 case/100 cats/year with skin disease.
- No breed or sex predisposition, most are DSH or Siamese.
- Age of onset: 1-17 years, median 7 years of age.
- Desmosomal target unknown in cats.
- Photo courtesy Dr. Jocelyn Wellington



### PF in cats: What causes it?

Most cases iatrogenic-no trigger



Reported drug induced cases in cats:

- Methimazole
- CimetidineAmpicillin
- > Itraconazole
- Lime sulfur
- Linic satial
- Ipodate
- Vaccination
- Doxycycline
- Underlying thymoma in 1 cat and leishmaniasis in 1 cat.

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### PF in cats: clinical presentations

- Pustules, erosions, crusts
- ▶ Symmetrical in 97% of cases
- Face/head 89%, concave/convex surfaces of ear pinnae 91%, claw folds 74%
- Common to see triad of face/head, nailbeds/feet, nipples.
- ► +/-pruritus as blisters emerge
- ▶ Lethargy, fever in >50% of cats with PF



### PF in cats: differential diagnoses

- ▶ Bacterial pyoderma-cats DO get it!
- ▶ Dermatophytosis: Trichophyton
- Drug eruption
- Atopy with secondary pyoderma
- Pemphigus erythematosus
- ► Herpes viral dermatitis if lesions only on head/face.



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## PF in cats: diagnosis Cytology or biopsy of crust or pustule-acantholytic cells ► Fungal culture of hair and crusts to rule out Trichophyton spp. Complete blood count History of medications, supplements, vaccines Photo courtesy Dr. Jocelyn Wellington



### Pemphigus foliaceus: treatment in CATS

- Oral steroids-no long acting injectables
- Comparison of High-dose oral prednisolone: 10mg/kg/day x 3 days then reduced dose OR standard prednisolone 2mg/kg/day—both methods had same time to control.
- High dose has no obvious benefit.
- Bizikova P, Burrows A. Feline PF: original case series and a comprehensive literature review. BMC Vet Res. 2019 15:22.

- Steroid options:
- ► Prednisolone 1-2mg/kg/day
- ► Triamcinolone acetonide 0.2mg/kg/day
- Dexamethasone 0.1mg/kg/day-tablet or injectable liquid given orally in food.
- Topicals- steroids: 0.1%mometasone, 0.1% betamethasone, 0.015% triamcinolone spray.
- ► Tacrolimus 0.1%

# Sorry! Some nerdy stuff on steroids in cats and how they differ from dogs...

- One study found cats have fewer dexamethasone receptors in the liver and skin and binding affinity of these receptors is less than in dogs.
- PredNISONE (prodrug) is not well absorbed by feline gi tract and/or converted into the active predNISOLONE.
- In one study, only 21% of orally administered predNISONE appeared in the blood as predNISOLONE.
- A single 2mg/kg prednisolone dose produced higher plasma prednisolone concentrations than prednisone (4x higher).
- Cats with a high body condition score had 2x prednisolone concentrations vs. cats with normal body condition.
- Simpson D, Burton G. Use of prednisolone as monotherapy in the treatment of feline PF: a retrospective study of 37 cats. Vet Derm 24(6) p. 598-e144.

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# Cats>Dogs more likely to be controlled on steroid monotherapy long term, but...

- 24/37 cats Rx prednisolone monotherapy for induction and maintenance CR in 4 weeks.
- 4/24 were able to discontinue meds
- 8/24 on weekly dose of 1.2mg/kg with a range of 0.5-3.5mg/kg
- 13/37 had other drugs added to the steroid to spare steroid dose or treat a relapse.
- Adverse effects of steroid monotherapy included:
- Increased appetite
- Weight gain
- Diarrhea
- Upper respiratory infections
- Transient diabetes
- Simpson DL, Burton GC. Use of prednisolone as monotherapy in the Rx of feline PF: a retrospective study of 37 cats. Vet Derm 2013;24: 598-601.

### When NOT to use steroid for PF

- In cases of diabetes, renal disease, pancreatitis, heart disease.
- OPTIONS include:
- Modified cyclosporine
- Chlorambucil
- Oclacitinib (off label)

- NOT OPTIONS
- Gold salts no longer available, adverse effects
- Azathioprine-neutropenia, leukopenia. Not advisable for use in cats. They don't have the enzyme to metabolize it (TMPT).

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# Nonsteroidal immunosuppressants: CATS Modified Cyclosporine (Atopica, Modulis)

- Modified cyclosporine 5-10mg/kg dailv.
- Average time to disease control: 41 days when used as monotherapy.
- Maintenance doses 0.7-6.7mg/kg daily
- More effective when used with steroids.
- Not to be used in outdoor cats or cats eating raw meat.
- Do not have compounded!



# Nonsteroidal immunosuppressants: CATS Chlorambucil (Leukeran)-refrigerate!

- Dose: 0.1-0.2mg/kg every 24-48 hours
- Compounded is much less expensive than brand name (\$27/tab—used to be \$2/tab!!!)
- Get cbc before, then in 2 wks., then in 4 wks., then in 3 months, then q 6 months.
- Start at once daily if severe case or every 48 hours. Use along with steroid or as monotherapy. Can reduce to 2x/wk. once in remission.
- Anorexia, vomiting, bone marrow suppression-adverse effects.

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# Study comparing steroid + chlorambucil or steroid + cyclosporine

- ▶ Did not find any difference in time to remission or disease response.
- But...cyclosporine group could reduce/stop steroids without a relapse while chlorambucil group could not.

Irwin KE, et al. Use of modified ciclosporin in the management of feline pemphigus foliaceus: a retrospective analysis. Vet Derm (2020) 23(5): 403e76.

### Oclacitinib for PF in cats

- 1mg/kg bid-50% reduction in pruritus and lesions after 7 days.
- Dose reduced to 0.5mg/kg bidowner stopped meds after 6 wks. and cat flared. Restarted meds and controlled achieved.
- Anecdotal: 1/4<sup>th</sup> of a l6mg tablet bid. Some nonresponders, some successful per ACVD members.
- Apparently dose of Oclacitinib needed for immunosuppression is higher than that for its anti-allergy effect.
- Remember, Oclacitinib for cats is off label use.
- Carrasco I, et al. Beneficial effect of oclacitinib in a case of feline PF. Vet Derm 2021 32(3) 299-301.
- Banovic, F et al. VetDerm 2019;30: 17-e6.

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# Successful management of feline PF with pentoxifylline and topical hydrocortisone aceponate (Cortavance).

- Cat was FIP positive and on an antiviral not approved for veterinary use when developed PF.
- Rx: pentoxifylline 26.5mg/kg q 12 hours, omega 3,6 fatty acids, and Cortavance (Virbac) spray bid to lesions.
- CR of lesions in 2 months.
- Topical steroid discontinued after 6 months. Pentoxifylline continued sid x 4 months then discontinued.
- Pentoxifylline used in humans with pemphigus vulgaris-inhibits TNFalpha. Role in feline PF?
- ► Hobi S, et. al. Vet Med Sci. 2022;8: 937-944.

### PF-refractory cases in cats-consider...

- Hypoallergenic diet
- UV light exposure
- Development of bacterial pyoderma, dermatophytosis while on therapy.
- Change to different steroid i.e. prednisolone to dexamethasone
- Underlying cancer: thymoma
- Don't use injectable long-acting steroid!
- The lesions can wax and wane.
- ▶ Is my diagnosis correct?

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- Prognosis in cats: good
- Majority of cats (90%) achieved disease control In < 1 month.</li>
- 17% able to go off meds. Most require long term treatment.
- ▶ 10% of cats-death or euthanasia
- Bizikova P, Burrows A. Feline PF: original case series and a comprehensive literature review. BMC Vet Res. 2019 15:22.

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# To sum it up-what do I use? PF in **Dogs**

- Get cbc/profile, fungal culture, biopsy or cytology.
- Prednisone 1mg/lb. or lower (especially in large dogs) daily if severe lesions but I prefer QOD.
- Start Azathioprine 1mg/lb. sid or qod depending upon severity of disease. Vit E 20iu/kg sid, sun avoidance. Doxycycline 5mg/kg bid/Niacinamide 250-500mg tid if pyoderma present.
- Recheck in 2 weeks-have owner call in 1 week. CBC/profile at 2 week recheck. Cbc/profile again in 1 month then cbc/profile q 3-6 months.
- Once lesions are resolving i.e. in 2 weeks then I slowly reduce prednisone dose i.e. if on 20mg sid, go to 15mg sid x 1-2 wks. then l0mg sid x 1-2 wks. and recheck. Continue Azathioprine as when started.
- Once reduction or discontinuation of prednisone, continue Azathioprine 3 months then reduce to god or MWF.
- Hypoallergenic prescription diet.

# To sum it up-what do I use?

- ▶ Prednisolone 1-2mg/lb. once daily.
- Chlorambucil (compounded) 0.1mg/kg MWF
- Get CBC, fungal culture, biopsy or cytology of lesions.
- Sun avoidance.
- Prescription hypoallergenic diet especially if cat is hard to pill. If hard to pill, consider dexamethasone (longer acting).
- No DepoMedrol injections-not effective in the long term.

- On recheck in 2 wks., get CBC.
- Reduce prednisolone dose i.e. if on 5mg bid, reduce to l l/2 tabs sid, continue Chlorambucil dose.
- If continues to improve after 2 wks. on 7.5mg sid, reduce to 5mg sid, etc. while continuing qod or MWF Chlorambucil.
- Recheck in another 2 weeks, get CBC and continue to reduce prednisolone.
- Can use topical Triamcinolone 0.1% to lesions (inexpensive).

### What about vaccinating a PF patient?

- At this time effect of immunosuppressives on vaccines is unknown.
- Keep on monthly flea, tick, and heartworm preventative.
- Discourage raw diet due to risk of bacterial translocation leading to systemic infection.
- Avoid dog parks, grooming or boarding.

- No live or modified-live vaccines.
- Only core vaccines should be considered.
- Consider administering 1 vaccine at a time, separated by 2 week intervals.
- Antibody titers where accepted.

▶ Waltor SA, 2023.

# Email me with any questions: ajeromin@purrfectpet.com

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