

Disk Surgery for Hamish's Back - by Annie Write, The Write One

Hamish is a six year old Airedale terrier who has always taken a laid-back approach to life's adventures, including his 13,000 mile relocation from Scotland and this was just fine with owners Dr's Bruce Russell and Ailsa McGregor from West Harbour in Auckland. Ailsa describes Hamish as "not the speediest dog in the world but always very lovable, sweet-natured and keen for a walk."

She says last year Hamish was getting even slower than normal. He couldn't jump into the car anymore and he had a problem getting up stairs - in fact moving about sometimes became a real challenge for him.

"Hamish was still perky but getting about was an effort. Then one morning in August, when I lifted him into the car, he howled in pain - and he also started to whimper occasionally when there didn't seem to be any reason for his discomfort so we decided it was time to consult the professionals."

They took Hamish down to their veterinarian Bruce Waldoock at West Harbour Veterinary Clinic, for a thorough examination. After a series of tests Bruce found Hamish had a problem with his back and neck. Bruce says Hamish presented with intermittent crying and whimpering and exhibited periodical lameness in his left hind leg. "Initially it looked like he had a cruciate problem - he had pain in extension to both joints and discomfort with his stifle. We undertook further investigation under anaesthetic so I could assess the stifle.' During the examination it became obvious it was not the stifle and, following discussions with Ailsa and Bruce, Hamish was referred to Veterinary Specialist Group (VSG) for further tests and treatment. "I'm a great fan of those guys at VSG and feel fortunate to have them just down the road for referrals if we need their help. It is great to be able to refer patients to VSG in situations where we feel those patients may benefit from additional expertise and access to their range of specialist equipment. VSG has one of the leading veterinary facilities in the Southern hemisphere and if they can't help, no one can."

Ailsa says both she and Bruce work in the field of Neuroscience at the University of Auckland and they had their own thoughts on what was happening with Hamish - they were concerned he may have a neurological problem and were happy he was being referred onto the VSG for specialist care.

"Hamish is such a sweetie and seeing him in pain was difficult for us and, of course, much worse for him. We wanted to get him the best help possible."

She says VSG Specialist Surgeon Richard Jerram did a myelogram to examine his spine and discovered a slipped disk near his tail. The collapsed disk had in turn trapped nerves near his tail giving him referred pain to his legs.

Richard recommended he operate to remove the top of the disk and insert a couple of large screws to hold the affected vertebrae apart and relieve pressure on the nerves. Ailsa says Richard carefully explained the procedure and reassured them about the risks of anaesthetic since Hamish also had a heart murmur.

"The operation was successful and after the operation Hamish

recovered really well. Initially we had to keep him on a regime of restricted exercise and keep him off the stairs so he could heal well. Although he was sore and sported a bald patch and plenty of stitches he was soon on the mend and back to his old self. In no time he was moving better - far better than normal!"

Ailsa says the care and compassion that they all experienced at VSG was amazing.

"Everyone from the front desk staff to the hands-on specialist veterinarians was so kind and the care was outstanding. Nothing was a bother and they took excellent care of both Hamish and us too! As researchers, we were very interested in the procedure and the VSG staff took time to explain and go through the x-rays and test results with us."

Hamish spent a week at VSG recovering post-op and Ailsa says they were encouraged to phone up and get updates on his condition - "in fact everyone made such a fuss of him that he didn't seem to miss us at all."

