The role of anatomists in the workup of clinical cases

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Since the idea of a fused college in veterinary medical imaging and anatomy was postulated, the possible role of anatomists in the workup of clinical cases has been discussed. The position of morphologists in clinical research has never been questioned, however the opinions on the value of their active participation in diagnosis, treatment and follow-up of presented patients in practice, remain divided. In this crosstalk we present a clinical case of a dog with a rare vascular anomaly for which clinicians consulted the department of Morphology, mainly for the diagnostic approach. This patient, a young male Whippet, was initially hospitalized on the neurology department with stress and exercise induced paraparesis. A diastolic heart murmur and the bilateral absence of femoral pulses rose the suspicion of a cardiac problem but no cardiac or abdominal vascular abnormalities were detected with ultrasound. At this point anatomists were consulted with the request for expertise in vascular morphology and suggestions for another diagnostic approach. Through evaluating the patient and considering the clinical findings, an aortic occlusion and bypass circulation were suspected. Contrast studies to visualize the vascular anatomy were proposed. The dog was eventually diagnosed by means of CT-angiography with thoracic aortic dissection and, due to aortic occlusion, a collateral circulation to the hind limbs through the epigastric arteries.

Conclusions

In our opinion anatomists can play a significant role in the workup of patients in practice, mainly in the planning and interpreting of the diagnostic strategy and often in collaboration with medical imagers and surgeons. However, also in other disciplines, as was the case in our presented patient for neurology and cardiology, collaboration with anatomists in clinical cases can be beneficial. It is evident that the surplus value of morphological expertise is not so much pursued in the workup of first-line patients but more so in referred cases.