

Another Option For Ferrets With Adrenal Gland Disease

Deslorelin acetate implants temporarily eliminate signs of adrenal gland disease in ferrets.

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A deslorelin acetate implant can temporarily minimize or eliminate the signs of adrenal gland disease in ferrets.

Adrenal gland disease, or adrenocortical disease (ACD), remains one of the most common — and devastating — clinical conditions diagnosed in pet ferrets in the United States, but there's new hope for them and their owners. Researchers have identified a promising treatment that temporarily eliminates clinical signs of the disease, thereby improving the ferret's quality of life.

Adrenal gland disease typically affects neutered, middle-aged to senior ferrets, said Robert Wagner, VMD, from the division of laboratory animal resources at the University of Pittsburgh, who authored several studies on the treatment of ferrets with adrenocortical disease. In these ferrets, Wagner said, the disease causes the abnormal growth of adrenocortical tissue or the adrenal glands, which release an oversupply of steroid hormones that lead to common ACD symptoms like hair loss in male and female ferrets, a swollen vulva in female ferrets, and an enlarged prostate and increased aggressiveness in male ferrets.

Treatment for ACD traditionally involves surgical removal of one or both of the ferret's adrenal glands. But if surgery isn't an option, veterinarians may recommend one of several drugs, including leuprolide, which is a GnRH analog that reduces the amount of circulating estrogen and androgens, and melatonin, which is believed to reduce GnRH secretion by the pituitary gland, reports Lauren Johnson, DVM, et al, of the department of small animal medicine and surgery, and the department of pathology, college of veterinary medicine, at the University of Georgia in Athens.

But a new treatment is on the horizon.

Suprelorin For Ferrets

Deslorelin acetate implants, made by Peptech Animal Health Pty Limited in New South Wales, Australia, and sold under the brand name Suprelorin, turns off the ferret's system "such that the hormones which are causing the adrenal problems are also turned off while the implant is releasing the deslorelin," said Peptech managing director Paul A. Schober, MBA, FRACI.

The clinical response to the deslorelin acetate implants is impressive. Wagner, et al, report in the *Journal of Exotic Pet Medicine*, Vol. 18, No 2 (April 2009), that "administration of a single 4.7 mg implant of deslorelin acetate resulted in significant decreases in the clinical signs and hormonal concentrations associated with ACD. Within 14 days post-implant, vulvar swelling, pruritus [itchiness], sexual behaviors and aggression decreased or disappeared. Hair re-growth was evident by 4 to 6 weeks post implant. Within two months post deslorelin implant, plasma concentrations of steroid hormones decreased."

Page 2>>