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The clinical examination

The clinical examination of a bovine animal requires certain precautions:

- ▣ An animal tethered in its usual place
- ▣ A well-lit barn, not cramped or noisy
- ▣ The examination is difficult in a free-stall system

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Medical history and preliminary assessment

Purpose:

- ▣ To provide information about the illness and the circumstances leading up to its onset
- ▣ Provides valuable information for the examination

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Medical history and preliminary examination

- ▣ The symptoms observed are characteristic and linked to the presumed location of the disease, e.g.:
- ▣ Regurgitation, bloating, colic, diarrhoea (presumed site of the disease: digestive system); sneezing, coughing, dyspnoea (respiratory system)
- ▣ Difficult urination, haematuria (urinary tract); lameness, paralysis (musculoskeletal system or nervous system).

Medical history and preliminary assessment

The main questions concern:

- ▣ the duration of the illness, its nature, its progression, the symptoms and circumstances of onset, the suspected cause of the illness and, finally, any treatment administered prior to the vet's arrival

Medical history and preliminary examination

▣ **Duration of the illness**

The illness can take several forms:

- ▣ The **hyperacute** form (a few hours to 2 days)
- ▣ The **acute** form (3–14 days)
- ▣ The **subacute** form (2 to 3 weeks)
- ▣ The **chronic** form lasting more than 4 weeks

Medical history and preliminary examination

- ▣ The course of the disease does not indicate its **severity**; for example, an infectious disease may have a **sudden** onset and a **short** duration, but the symptoms are more **pronounced**, whereas a parasitic disease progresses **slowly** with **gradual** worsening.

Medical history and preliminary examination

- ▣ In animals with **acute** illnesses, body condition score remains **normal**; however, it is significantly **reduced** in those with **chronic** illnesses (cachexia)

Medical history and preliminary assessment

- ▣ **Progression and consequences of the disease's symptoms**

Identifying pathognomonic symptoms will be of great help to the vet in determining which system is affected; a diagnosis should never be made hastily

Medical history and preliminary investigation

The questions concern the progression and circumstances: did the disease develop whilst grazing? The answer helps to rule out certain diseases associated with **indoor** housing or, conversely, those associated with **grazing**

E.g.: babesiosis (contracted when turned out to pasture), whereas food-borne haemoglobinuria occurs in the barn following excessive consumption of forage plants, e.g. cabbage

Medical history and preliminary examination

- ▣ Has the animal **previously** shown similar symptoms? If so, this may be a **recurrence**, which must be assessed accordingly in terms of both **diagnosis and prognosis**
- ▣ E.g.: significant ruminal bloating resulting from the presence of a foreign body in the oesophagus has a better chance of recovery than recurrent bloating resulting from functional stenosis following damage to the vagus nerve.

Medical history and preliminary assessment

- ▣ A distinction must be made between:
- ▣ sporadic diseases
- ▣ enzootic diseases
- ▣ epizootic diseases

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- ▣ A **sporadic disease** is a disease that occurs only occasionally within a population. Such diseases occur in a more or less isolated, intermittent or rare manner, as opposed to being epidemic or endemic. They are occasionally apparent, but can sometimes also be chronic at the same time.
- ▣ Diseases that are observed only occasionally, and generally without geographical concentration, are called sporadic diseases. Examples of sporadic diseases include tetanus, rabies and the plague. Gastroenteritis can be considered sporadic but is primarily an acute disease.

- ▣ Sporadic diseases occur only rarely and largely without any geographical pattern.
- ▣ Enzootic diseases occur at a constant (and often low) level within a population. Epizootics occur when an outbreak occurs at a significantly higher level than expected, either locally or globally.

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Medical history and preliminary examination

- ▣ It is necessary to ascertain whether all the animals are affected at the same time or one after the other
- ▣ It may be an outbreak (contagious disease, poisoning)
- ▣ In the event of an enzootic disease, slaughtering the affected animal to perform a post-mortem examination may provide pathognomonic clues.

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Medical history and preliminary examination

Causes of the disease

The suspected cause of the illness must be identified.

Questions should cover:

- ▣ Feed: quantity, composition, quality, any changes to the ration
- ▣ Rearing conditions (hygiene, contact with other cattle)
- ▣ The animal's intended use (dairy or beef)



Medical history and preliminary assessment

- ▣ **Possible treatment**
- ▣ It is of paramount importance to establish whether treatment has already been initiated
- ▣ Ex1: Pneumonia caused by aspiration following the administration of oral medication
- ▣ Ex2: Perforation of the oesophagus following an incorrectly performed oropharyngeal catheterisation
- ▣ Ex 3: Generalised peritonitis following an incorrect rumen puncture

Commemorative

▣ **Breed and zootechnical purpose**

Certain breeds are predisposed to particular diseases, e.g. abomasal displacement is observed in dairy cows, cancerous tumours in white-headed cattle, and hypoplasia of the female genital tract is observed in white Shorthorn heifers (white heifer disease)

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Commemorative

The zootechnical purpose is very important

- ▣ in fattening animals, we can expect diseases linked to intensive feeding such as indigestion, laminitis, etc.
- ▣ Dairy breeds are prone to metabolic disorders
- ▣ Draft cattle are predisposed to diseases of the musculoskeletal and respiratory systems
- ▣ Diseases of the reproductive system are of paramount importance in breeding cattle

Commemorative

Gender and age

Age and sex may predispose cattle to certain diseases

ex1: Young cattle are more susceptible to parasitic infections than adult cattle that are already immune

Ex2: Foreign body-induced RPT is more common in adults than in young cattle

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Commemorative

- ▣ When the date of birth cannot be established, the age
- ▣ in calves based on the condition of the navel, the umbilical cord and the gums, as well as the appearance of the hooves or the condition of the horns
- ▣ In young cattle, age is judged by the degree of wear on the milk teeth and the size of the horns

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Pregnancy

- ▣ For the vet, it is very important to know the condition of the female; certain medicines must be dosed with care or are even contraindicated in animals in late pregnancy, e.g. certain medicines for tapeworms and hypodermosis

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Commemorative

- ▣ In adults, based on the grooves in the horns, and the replacement and wear of the incisors.
- ▣ Note: this assessment is approximate as horn growth, as well as tooth replacement and wear, depend on the breed of the animal and its diet
- ▣ It is important to state the basis on which the age estimate was made, e.g. a 6-year-old bull based on dental age, with a margin of error of ± 6 months

Commemorative

▣ Animal's weight

Knowing the animal's weight makes it possible

- ▣ you to assess its body condition by comparing the animal with healthy peers of the same age
- ▣ Accurate dosing of medication
- ▣ Measuring tapes used to assess a cow's weight are no more accurate than the assessment made by an experienced person.

- ▣ To estimate the weight of a live animal, simply measure its chest circumference behind the shoulder. Once you have determined the circumference in centimetres, look up the corresponding weight in kilograms on the back of the tape measure.

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