

Inbred pedigree dogs under investigation

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Sydney University veterinary specialists are embarking on a project to tackle the animal welfare problems that result from current pedigree dog breeding practices.

The breeding of pedigree dogs to produce exaggerated physical features characteristic of top show dogs can lead to severe inherited diseases according to the experts.

In the UK the problem is now so bad that last year the [BBC refused to broadcast](#) the world famous Crufts dog show for the first time in 40 years as a protest against the practice.

This week it was announced that the [RSPCA \(UK\)](#) will be working with the University of Sydney and the Royal Veterinary College on a three year research project to create a new electronic system for collecting, analysing, and reporting data on inherited disorders in both dogs and cats.

Associate Professor [Paul McGreevy](#) from Sydney University's [Faculty of Veterinary Science](#) will be developing a sustainable reporting framework that will allow inherited disorders to be monitored, and allow breeders to 'know the enemy', identifying trends in inherited disorders and ultimately providing a disease surveillance system for all companion animal diseases.

"Extreme types are predisposed to certain diseases but many inherited disorders are not directly attributable to a given breed standard," said Professor McGreevy. "Because of natural selection, deleterious genes tend to occur at a low frequency, and hence the incidence of any particular defect is usually so low as to not cause a major concern. However, the mating of close relatives changes this drastically by bringing deleterious recessive genes out into the open, where their effect can be seen."

The proposed research is important as it will summarise the prevalence of inherited disorders in the UK pedigree dog population for the first time, and will inform a road map of progress. It has the potential to help identify areas in which selection pressures are poorly applied and highlight problems with current selection practices.

Pedigree dogs appearing at shows are required to conform to written breed standards (or specifications) held by the Kennel Club and derived in consultation with breed societies. As a result, in many breeds, specific physical attributes have been selected preferentially, with a corresponding lack of attention to health, temperament, welfare and functionality.

"It is an unfortunate consequence of 'closed studbooks' that even without pressure from breed standards many outstanding breeders still find themselves producing dogs with serious defects," said Professor McGreevy. Examples of the inherited disorders reported in dogs are available [to download](#).

If you would like to contribute to an Australian version of this UK initiative, a fund-raising campaign is being coordinated by the [Veterinary Science Foundation](#) at the University of Sydney.

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