

One Lump, or Two? Part 2

(Hit Me Again Baby)

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This article will deal with the second part of our little series, "One Lump or Two". There is no question that the majority of lumps that you find on your animal will be either the cervical lump which we dealt with last time, or some other benign mass originating in the skin or subcuticular tissues of the cavy. These tumors tend to form discrete nodules that can range from small to large in size and may be solid although many of them are filled with sebaceous matter or other cellular detritus depending on the origin of the cells that make up the lump or cyst.

If I had access to a free pathology lab, I would definitely have the solid tumors analyzed, more for academic interest than anything. Best practice is of course the adage: if it's worth taking off, it's worth having the histology done on it. I have to be honest and say that it probably wouldn't change how I manage the growths.

Here are the names of some of these "lumps": sebaceous cysts, trichofolliculomas, epitheliomas, trichoepitheliomas, fibrosarcoma,,sebaceous adenomas, lipomas, fibrolipomas, sarcomas and adenocarcinoma (what a mouthful). Of these tumors, which comprise roughly 15 percent of all neoplasia in cavies, the most common by far are the trichofolliculomas. These are often found in the lumbosacral area of the cavy (Greenacre 628).

How I handle these cutaneous tumors in my animals:

I ignore most of these tumors, I must admit. That may not be the BEST academic thing to do, but when you weigh cost and anesthetic risk (small but present), unless you are compelled to know what that lump is, it is probably reasonable just to let the thing alone if it is not causing distress to the animal. It is not uncommon for some of these tumors/cysts to rupture through the skin and start spilling their contents onto the coat and consequently, the risk of infection increases. At that point, pretty much when the tumor has forced the issue, it may be time to excise or remove it. This is done under either general anesthesia or heavy sedation and local anesthetic with a surgical scrub and sterile protocol. What helps determine the anesthetic regimen to use is the location, size and what is going to be involved in removing the "lump". Often it is possible to sort of "probe" the mass with a needle after it has been numbed to get a feel for what the mass might be. Removal is pretty straightforward. So far, all of the lumps that I have removed have been filled with some sort of sebum/cellular debris and I have been able to remove the contents of the mass and then peel out the cellular lining. Most of these are allowed to heal in by themselves if they are in a location where bedding, feces, etc., will not contaminate the area and if they are of reasonably small size. If all the cells that make up the cyst wall or tumor are not removed, you could reasonably expect it to re-grow.

The last lump that I would like to discuss is the mammary gland tumor. These may be found in both sows and boars. (This is not to be confused with a sow with mastitis who may well develop a lump in her mammary gland which is really an abscess that may eventually drain to the outside. When you have mastitis this severe, usually the function of that gland is compromised due to the formation of scar tissue both in the substance of the gland and the duct system. This will be a topic for a future article.) The types of tumors that are found are mammary gland fibroadenoma and adenocarcinoma, with benign tumors being the most common. (Mehler, Bennett 785) If you elect to do nothing, the tumor, even benign ones, may necrose (rot) through the overlying skin of the mammary gland. They can become so large and painful and infected that they interfere with the animal's ability and willingness to move. At that point you are not left with many options available to you and the pig. If discovered when small enough, surgical removal is an option.

There are other things of course that can cause swelling underneath the skin of a cavy. Hernias (which I have seen once) and myiasis (fly-strike) for animals kept outside are two things which come to mind. I have seen *Cuterebra* - think warble - infestation exactly once in a rabbit and once in a cavy. That's not a lot, but something to keep in mind.

Greenacre, Cheryl B., "Spontaneous tumors of small mammals." Veterinary Clinics of North America Exotic Animal Practice 7(2004): 627-651.

Mehler, Stephen J. and Bennett, R.Avery., "Surgical oncology of exotic animals." Veterinary Clinics of North America Exotic Animal Practice 7 (2004): 783-805.

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