

Body Politic

Interbreed partnerships narrow the gap between today's medical questions and tomorrow's cures.

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Fifteen years ago, it took a courageous breeder to speak openly about illnesses and conditions. Fearing negative publicity for their kennels, most breeders resisted exposing problems. Slowly, this attitude changed. Today, nearly every breed club understands that it is healthier to face problems. Permanent health committees identify and discuss health issues, recruiting owners to provide blood and skin samples for researchers.

With recent advances in canine genetics, many intractable illnesses, including coronary ailments, spinal conditions, blindness, epilepsy, and the most dreaded of all – cancer – are slowly giving up their secrets to relentless scientific investigations. Members of breed clubs have been the most important force driving this progress.

Now, breeders who deny problems are the ones putting their reputations at risk.

Challenging the Concept of Breeds

There is good reason to be optimistic about the promise of genetic research. But it also poses challenges to some basic ways in which breed clubs think of research and the way fanciers view their breeds. Although, for reasons still not completely clear, certain conditions affect one breed more than another, numerous diseases affect several breeds equally. Genetic researchers make an increasingly convincing case that, despite appearances, all dog breeds share essential biology and genetics.

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