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Exploring the information and support needs of owners caring for a dog with canine cognitive dysfunction

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Background

Canine cognitive dysfunction (CCD) is an age-related neurodegenerative disease, sharing similar symptoms to Alzheimer's disease in humans [1], requiring high levels of care from owners. Whilst it is recognized that CCD has a large impact on the owner as well as the dog [2], there is a paucity of research identifying support and information provided to those caring for dogs with CCD, and effectiveness in enabling owners to provide care. The objectives of this qualitative study were to explore the information and support provided to dog owners at the time of CCD diagnosis and investigate the sources of information and support owners engaged with following diagnosis. Additionally, this study aimed to critically evaluate how different sources have impacted owners, how they support their dog and make recommendations to improve support offered.

Methods

Sixty-six owners of dogs with CCD completed an online survey, gaining demographic information of dog and owner, exploring participants experience of CCD, support, and information options at and following diagnosis. Data were transcribed and analysed using descriptive statistics and inductive grounded theory. Semi-structured interviews were completed with six participants, focusing on owner's experiences of diagnosis, and the effectiveness of strategies of providing information and support. Results were transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis.

Results

Owners report many stressors when caring for a dog with CCD. Whilst 98.48% (n=65) of respondents reported feeling that improving their understanding of CCD had been beneficial in supporting their dog, it was often a challenging and frustrating experience to gain accurate information and consistent support. From the interviews six key themes were identified; impacts of CCD, experience of diagnosis, experience following diagnosis, seeking answers, approach matters and awareness and options (Figure 1). A multimodal approach is required to effectively support owners of dogs with CCD, key areas included symptom awareness and planning for a decline in health.

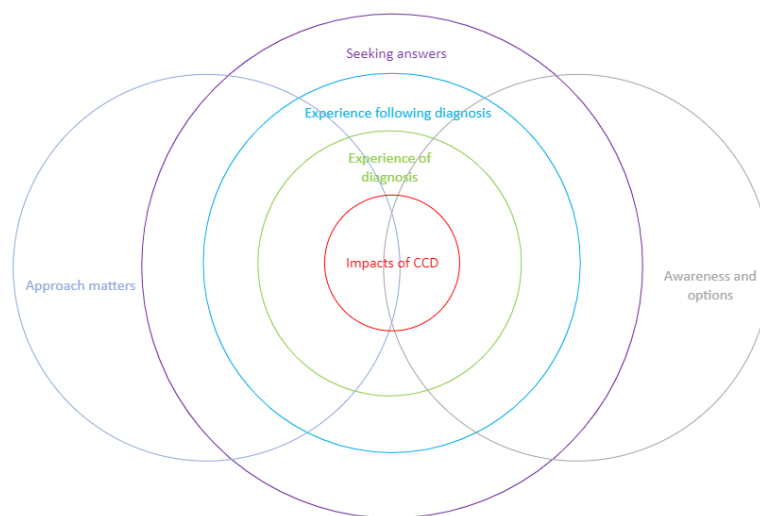


Figure 1. Schematic diagram of interlinking themes

Conclusion

Effective support and information are important in helping owners care for dogs with CCD, including managing symptoms that can lead to carer strain and associated health implications for the owner. This research highlighted that owners struggle to get accurate information and support however, when appropriate and easily accessible, support and information can be effective at helping them to navigate the stressors of CCD. Provision of accessible and focused 'multimodal' resources is vital to ensuring the wellbeing of both the owner and the dog with CCD.

References

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