

## K9 ReC Center: Signs of Early Injury in K9 Retired Dogs

### *K9 Retired Dogs are those that have served our state or country and have been retired due to age, injury, or illness.*

- *Has your K9 been sleeping more and more since being retired?*
- *Is she panting heavily when laying down?*
- *Does he cough when resting?*
- *Does she sometimes have a drop of blood in one or both of her nostrils or when she sneezes?*
- *Does he eat most of the time but not always?*
- *Is she stiff after getting up from resting or limp briefly?*
- *Is he more distended in the belly lately?*
- *Is she drinking more than usual?*

K9 Retired Dogs may continue with high drive, and a high level of function, but this does not mean they are sound, pain-free, or at their optimal performance. K9s are notorious for masking their primary health issue or injury so well that they do not actually end up seeking vet care until their compensatory mechanisms are challenged. *This does not change when they retire.* Even the K9 Retired dog is quite capable of getting into *the Zone* and focusing out medical changes, pain, or injuries. Balancing mental and emotional drive with gradually decreasing physical capability can be challenging in K9 Retired Dogs. Retirement is just as stressful on them as it is for first responder career humans.

It is critical K9 Retired Dogs continue to get routine general health exams. But they also greatly benefit from continued routine *specialized* evaluation beyond the general physical exam that takes into consideration their life-long career demands and long-term unique medical, physical, and mental health needs. Specialized exams that provide job-relevant evaluation are essential for maintaining optimal physical and mental health and facilitating a long, healthy retirement.

### **VSC's K9 ReC Center's goal is to provide the following.**

1. **Early detection** [e.g., tendonitis, calcification of tendons, intervertebral disc disease (IVDD), gastric ulcers, depression]
2. **Decrease risk of major illness or injury** [e.g., depression, splenic rupture, congestive heart failure (CHF), tendon rupture]
3. **Optimal, effective treatment** [e.g., Platelet-rich Plasma (PrP), stem cell therapy, diet management, surgery, cognitive enrichment therapy]
4. **Specialized rehabilitation focused on their unique needs for physically and mentally healthy retirement**

VSC K9 ReC Center Rehabilitation Medicine is not just about a checklist of physical exercises for your Mature K9. Our K9 team is trained and experienced not only in physical conditioning and rehabilitation but in maintaining Mature K9 *mental health*. Just as injury or retirement in human athletes, K9 retirement can sometimes lead to depression, heightened separation anxiety, altered metabolism changing brain metabolism (a contributing factor to decreased mental acuity and health), an increase in undesired behavior, or other mental health challenges. K9 Retired Dogs may find it difficult to not

only change from highly regimented to less structured days but to have fewer physical and mental challenges to keep their drive occupied. VSC's K9 ReC Center Team is highly motivated to evaluate, treat and maintain mental health in the Mature K9.

Finally, as the K9 Retired Dog matures, medical illnesses can creep up and contribute to pain, lameness, and even subtle changes in quality of life. Remember, K9s are notorious for masking their primary health issue or injury so well that they do not actually seek vet care until their compensatory mechanisms run out. Retirement does not change this. Some examples of general health changes that may easily be masked in a retired high-performance K9.

- **Enlarged spleen or liver** – Compromise of highly vascular organs like the liver and spleen can be suddenly fatal if not caught early and treated. Routine screening for changes in these organs is essential for earlier detection and treatment.
- **Dilated cardiomyopathy (DCM)** – In large working dogs, the degree of change that may indicate heart disease is much less than that expected in small dogs with heart disease. It takes far more change in volume to manifest changes in heart size in larger, athletic dogs. For this reason, heart disease can go under or undiagnosed in Mature K9s. The earlier heart disease is diagnosed, the better opportunity to treat it and even slow its progression.
- **Respiratory changes** – There are some questions regarding the potential for sniffing dogs to develop acute, chronic or latent respiratory infection or disease. While the lower respiratory tract (LRT) is protected by the larynx when swallowing, it is not during the sniff according to research in humans. There is no known research specifically in dogs. Thus, theoretically, K9 lungs could be at risk for lung exposure to agents being sniffed. Research does show, however, that dogs are at low risk for developing disease from the naturally occurring sporulated bacteria, anthrax. Nonetheless, routine screening of respiratory function is advised for K9 Retired Dogs.

Our specially trained K9 team understands that many things contribute to not only health and well-being but a happy, K9 Retired Dog. We strive to continually better understand the complex, multi-dimensionality that makes up the Mature K9 so that s/he satisfies their *need* to physically and mentally stay sharp to maintain happy retirement!

***If you think your K9 Retired Dog may have early signs of injury, illness, or cognitive decline, please contact us to schedule a K9 ReC Center Initial Consult. No referral required.***

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*Veterinary Specialty Center is guided by the belief that companion animals deserve state-of-the-art medical care in a kind and comforting environment. The courage of our patients, the loyalty of their human families, and the devotion of our referral veterinarians inspire our vision. It is sustained by the contributions of our compassionate, knowledgeable and dedicated staff and built upon a tradition of providing unsurpassed healthcare for animals.*

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