

**CONVERSATION WITH DR. JEROLD
S. BELL ON HOW BREEDERS CAN REDUCE
GENETIC DISEASE IN OUR BREED
(Part Two)**

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The following is the second part of a conversation that I had with Dr. Bell when he was a guest on the Joybreeding Internet List in early 2001. This conversation is reprinted here with his permission.

OK, back with part II. So, we once again return to the problem, which is the popular sires. What can we do about it? It is very flattering to have a dog that everyone wants to breed to. If you deny stud service, you will upset people who think you are holding out from allowing THEM to get the brass ring too. I believe popular stud owners must recognize the effect of overseeding the gene pool. It's a lot of fun winning all the ribbons, and there is no reason you can't continue in competitions. But breeders should consider the consequences of breeding indiscriminately. Along with my "different breeders/different goals" belief, there are breeders that would not breed to a popular sire, simply because too many people are going to him. Good for them. These are the lines that will be kept "pure" from his influence. OK, let's go on to decreasing genetic disease and increasing the health of the breed. Most of my recommendations on disorders without known modes of inheritance, or without tests for carriers involve knowledge of affected or carrier dogs in the depth and breadth of the pedigree. Well, most people are not talking about the affected dogs they produced. Many don't know about them, because they have not followed up on their puppies. Some that did follow up were castigated by pet owners of affected dogs. How could you sell us a dog like this? Do you know what this has done to my family?

Well, nobody said this was easy. No one wants to produce affected dogs, or to indiscriminately breed carriers. In every genetic disease control program I have been involved with, the vast majority of owners of affected dogs have been pleased that their breeder is interested in their dog, and in improving the breed so that other affected dogs are not produced. If an affected dog comes to your attention, so your concern. Everyone understands that you cannot predict and prevent everything, but conscientious breeders do the best they can.

Many national clubs have established open registries. Depending on the mindset of the breeders, there are different types of registries, and different levels of openness. More national clubs are having health seminars and screening clinics at their specialties, emphasizing the importance of genetic disease monitoring and control. It used to be thought that such events would scare away potential buyers from a breed. We now know that without talking about the problems, in the long run the breed may not be there for the buyers.

Have breeds been successful in reducing genetic disease? Yes. Unfortunately, with the modern tools available, some breeds have been too successful, and caused other problems. I alluded to these in earlier posts: Moving away from one disease and toward another (fixating on stud dogs known to be clear of the gene who then become popular sires themselves). Creating bottlenecks and diminishing diversity by eliminating all carriers, instead of breeding and replacing them -- lose the single gene, not the whole line (or the other tens of thousand of genes). Concentrating on a single gene, and not the whole dog -- we are breeding to produce a better dog, not just a heart, an eye, or a hip.

Well, I've gone on long enough. Is there a simple answer? No. Maybe I've confused you all enough to fulfill my goal of different breeders doing different things. There are lots of problems, and lots of ways

to breed, and if we didn't all love our dogs, we would have given up a long time ago. I hope that I have given you things to think about, and talk about among yourselves, and especially within your breeds. You are the custodians of their future.

Sincerely,

Jerold S. Bell, DVM

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Dr. Bell is also a frequent speaker for breed club seminars. Many of his canine genetics articles may be found on the Internet.