

Borders vet Hannah honoured for work tackling canine arthritis

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A Borders vet committed to raising awareness of arthritis in dogs has won the impact award at this year's Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons prize giving ceremony.

Hannah Capon, of Greenside Veterinary Practice in St Boswells, has been honoured for her voluntary work educating dog owners and fellow professionals about the condition.

Hannah, originally from Essex but now living in Earlston, founded Canine Arthritis Management in 2013 to try to cut unnecessary loss of dogs to the disease.



Andrew Armitage and Hannah Capon at Greenside Vets in St Boswells.

The 41-year-old, a vet for 18 years but only employed at the St Boswells practice since last year, said: "I was working in Brighton at the time and had just had two dogs put down back to back.

"I had a lot of issues with how many dogs I was seeing being put to sleep because they were struggling to walk or were off their back legs.

"It was so expected and routine that it wasn't talked about any more.

"Otherwise-healthy dogs could have been struggling for many years before being put down and nobody challenged or questioned it."

That prompted her to found Canine Arthritis Management, an online resource offering free advice to other vets and dog owners via web chats, online tutorials and guest lectures to the enterprise's 26,500 online followers across its website, YouTube channel and social media accounts.

Hannah, the royal college's 2019 vet of the year, launched the website, now attracting 40,000 hits a month, in 2017 after raising £7,500 on a fundraising eight-day walk with dog Holly, who died last year.

Together with a core team of five other like-minded volunteers, she now enlists a wider team of specialists, academics and the odd celebrity, such as TV presenter Clare Balding, to feature in online lectures.

"It's about getting people to learn from other people's lightbulb moments," she said.

"The key to early diagnosis is the owner and getting them to question and understand how dogs express pain.

"People need to realise that arthritis is not a disease of the elderly, as it is seen in humans. With dogs, it is different. They get arthritis because of joint abnormalities.

“It’s subtle, slight defects that cause arthritis, and we see a lot of dogs with severe arthritis just one or two years old.

“If the pain is not attended to, it magnifies, becoming worse and permanent.

“There’s a lot that people don’t understand about the disease in their dogs, and we are appealing for them to please listen to us.

“We are trying our best to bring attention to a very neglected disease and to help people realise that musculoskeletal health and arthritis are intertwined.

“Canine Arthritis Management has grown because we have realised that it is not just older dogs that are affected. Protecting them from pain caused by arthritis is an integral part of dog care from six months onwards.

“If I could have one wish, it would be to have an awesome benefactor who sees the benefit of what we are doing and helps us turn it into a truly global resource for owners.

“I believe that we should be able to keep giving this information and advice to owners for free.”

With next month’s awards postponed due to the ongoing Covid-19 lockdown, Hannah will have to wait until Friday, October 2 to pick up her award at a ceremony in London.

Veterinary nurse Lynsey Tindall nominated Hannah for her award, and she added: “Hannah has been working tirelessly over the past four years to get Canine Arthritis Management to where it is now and still has so much ambition for its future.”

“Her drive, passion and determination to bring awareness to owners and improvements to the veterinary profession’s care of arthritic dogs are second to none.

“She truly deserves this recognition with the impact award.”

RCVS President Dr Niall Connell added: “My hearty congratulations to all of this year’s award winners. Once again, it was a very strong field of people who have made and are making an indelible impact on veterinary science, the professions, animal health and welfare, food safety, public health, and plenty more besides.

“These are very tough times for the profession and the country as a whole, but these awards are a reminder of just how much talent, knowledge, and skill we have to offer our animals, our fellow human beings and our country when we work together for the greater good.

“I am particularly glad that we are awarding three Honorary Associateships this year, after a number of years in which none were awarded. All of our outstanding Honorary Associates demonstrate how and where non-veterinary colleagues can collaborate so effectively with veterinary professionals to bring about positive outcomes on animal and human health and welfare.”