



## **Prolapse of the Nictatans Gland AKA Cherry Eye**

### **What is a prolapsed third eyelid gland?**

A prolapsed third eyelid gland, commonly called “cherry eye”, occurs when the tear-producing gland that is normally located at the base of the third eyelid becomes loose and protrudes beyond the margin of the third eyelid. It appears as a pink bulge at the inner corner of the eye. When the gland is prolapsed, it can become inflamed because it is exposed and tends to dry out. With time, this can result in damage to the gland and a subsequent reduction in tear production (dry eye), which is painful and can result in corneal ulceration or scarring of the cornea (the normally clear surface of the eye) that can potentially affect vision.

### **Why does “cherry eye” occur?**

This condition occurs most commonly in young dogs, and may result because the ligament that keeps the gland of the third eyelid in its normal position is weak. This allows the gland to move out of its normal position and become visible. Rarely, cherry eye will also occur in cats.

### **What is the treatment?**

The treatment for cherry eye is surgery to replace the gland into its normal position. There are two general surgical techniques that can be used to replace the gland. First, a “pocket” can be created on the underside of the third eyelid into which the gland is positioned, and then the edges of the pocket are sutured together to hold the gland in place. The second technique involves using suture to tack the gland into place. For some dogs, particularly those that have had a prior surgery to replace the gland that has failed, we recommend performing both techniques in combination.

It is important not to remove this gland because this gland contributes to the production of tears, and its removal increases the risk of the development of dry eye.

### **What is the prognosis?**

With surgery to replace the gland, most dogs do very well. Although this condition is not an emergency, we recommend that surgery to replace the gland be performed soon after it becomes prolapsed (within a period of days to weeks) to reduce the risk of permanent damage to the gland. For many dogs, this condition ultimately affects both eyes, but not always simultaneously. There is a small risk that the gland will become prolapsed again after surgery, requiring a second surgery to replace the gland, or that dry eye will develop despite prompt replacement of the gland.

