

## **The Value of Necropsy**

Even mention of this topic makes most people squeamish; they don't want to bother the vet; they don't want the cost; they don't want to do anything more to their dog (never mind that he/she is gone to the Rainbow Bridge); they are exhausted by the cost and extent of medical care. I learned the value of autopsy long ago as a pediatric resident in training. Not all deaths had clear cut causes and it was only with autopsy that there came better understanding of the disease process in puzzling cases, the results provided a comforting closure to the family members. That lesson was repeated often enough in 25 years of medical practice to value the procedure highly; there were cases where autopsy did not help. I remembered this lesson when our first Beardie, dear Heather the Elder Feather (CH Kinloch Willow Signature, UD) died 6 wks after going blind at age 10 ½ yrs. Without an autopsy we would not have known that she died of an invasive nasal carcinoma!

Here's another illustrative case. At age 10 months, this young Beardie began to exhibit fear behaviors of everything. Aggression towards family members and strangers came along soon after. Dermatological and allergic type problems also developed; these were attended to medically and homeopathically. Because of escalating aggression towards family members the dog was euthanized when young. The family was heart broken with having to make the decision, even though human safety was of concern. Autopsy showed scarring on the frontal lobes of the brain, in an area which in humans can affect personality. The vet indicated to the family that the condition would not have improved and that it wasn't possible to know what caused the brain scarring or when it occurred. The autopsy findings gave relief to the family after the agonizing decision to euthanize a young dog whom they dearly loved. Permission was given to relate this case in anonymity in the hopes that others will consider an autopsy on their beloved dearly departed Beardie.