

The steel behind Beijing's soft power play

AP PHOTO



Hospitality staff members near the large portrait of Chairman Mao on Tiananmen Gate before the closing ceremony of China's 19th Party Congress on October 24

By James Kynge in London

On the Google map of Beijing there is an empty quarter, an urban block next to the Communist party's leadership compound in which few of the buildings are named. At street level, the aura of anonymity is confirmed. Uniformed guards stand by grand entrances checking official cars as they come and go. But there are no identifying signs; the sole information divulged is on brass plaques that bear the street name and building numbers.

The largest of these nameless compounds is 135 Fuyou Street, the offices of the United Front Work Department of the Chinese Communist party, known as the United Front for short. This is the headquarters of China's push for global "soft power", a multi-faceted but largely confidential mission that Xi Jinping, China's president who on Wednesday was confirmed in place until at least 2022, has el-

evated into one of the paramount objectives of his administration.

The building, which stretches for some 200m at street level, signifies the scale of China's ambition. Winning "hearts and minds" at home and abroad through United Front work is crucial to realising the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese people", Mr Xi has said. Yet the type of power exercised by the cadres who work behind the neoclassical façade of 135 Fuyou Street is often anything but soft.

A Financial Times investigation into United Front operations in several countries shows a movement directed from the pinnacle of Chinese power to charm, co-opt or attack well-defined groups and individuals. Its broad aims are to win support for China's political agenda, accumulate influence overseas and gather key information.

United Front declined interview requests for this article and its website yields only sparse insights.

However, a teaching manual for its cadres, obtained by the Financial Times, sets out at length and in detail the organisation's global mission in language that is intended both to beguile and intimidate.

It exhorts cadres to be gracious and inclusive as they try to "unite all forces that can be united" around the world. But it also instructs them to be ruthless by building an "iron Great Wall" against "enemy forces abroad" who are intent on splitting China's territory or hobbling its development.

"Enemy forces abroad do not want to see China rise and many of them see our country as a potential threat and rival, so they use a thousand ploys and a hundred strategies to frustrate and repress us," according to the book, titled the "China United Front Course Book".

"The United Front [...] is a big magic weapon which can rid us of 10,000 problems in order to

seize victory," adds another passage in the book, which identifies its authors and editorial board as top-level United Front officials.

In a rare news conference this month, Zhang Yijiong, the executive vice-minister of United Front, said: "If the Chinese people want to be powerful and realise the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, then under the leadership of the Communist party we need to fully and better understand the use of this 'magic weapon'." Sun Chunlan, the head of United Front, this week retained her position in the newly selected politburo.

The organisation's structure exhibits the extraordinary breadth of its remit. Its nine bureaus cover almost all of the areas in which the Communist party perceives threats to its power. The third bureau, for instance, is responsible for work in Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and among about 60m overseas Chinese in more than 180 coun-

tries. The second bureau handles religion. The seventh and ninth are responsible respectively for Tibet and Xinjiang - two restive frontier areas that are home to Tibetan and Uighur minority nationalities.

Merriden Varrall, director at the Lowy Institute, an Australian think-tank, says that under Mr Xi there has been a distinct toughening in China's soft power focus. The former emphasis on reassuring others that China's rise will be peaceful is giving way to a more forceful line. "There has been a definite shift in emphasis since Xi Jinping took over," says Ms Varrall. "There is still a sense that reassuring others is important, but there is also a sense that China must dictate how it's perceived and that the world is biased against China."

“ Enemy forces abroad do not want to see China rise and many of them see our country as a potential threat and rival.

CHINA UNITED FRONT COURSE BOOK

The hard edge of United Front is evident in its current struggle over the future reincarnation of the 14th Dalai Lama, the 82-year-old exiled Tibetan spiritual leader who Beijing castigates as a separatist bent on prising Tibet from Chinese control.

Tradition dictates that after a Dalai Lama dies, the high priesthood of Tibetan Lamaism searches for his reincarnation using a series of portents that lead them to his reborn soul in a child. The leaders of Tibetan Buddhism live in exile with the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala, northern India, raising the prospect that a reincarnation may be found somewhere beyond China's borders.

Beijing is alarmed. The last thing it wants is for the man it has called a "splittist" and a "wolf in monk's clothing" to be reincarnated in territory it does not control. United Front is charged with crafting a solution. The plan so far, officials said, is for the Communist party - which is officially atheist - to oversee a reincarnation search themselves within Chinese territory. Partly to this end, it has helped create a database of more than 1,300 officially approved "living Buddhas" inside Tibet who will be called on when the time comes to endorse Beijing's choice.



The steel behind Beijing's soft power play (continued)



“The reincarnation of all living Buddhas has to be approved by the Chinese central government,” says Renqingluobu, an ethnic Tibetan official and a leader of the Association for International Culture Exchange of Tibet, a United Front affiliate.

“If [the Dalai Lama] decides to find the reincarnation in a certain place outside of Tibet, then Tibetans will wonder what sort of reincarnation is this and the masses will think that religion must be false, empty and imaginary after all,” said Mr Renqingluobu on a recent visit to London.

The Tibetan government-in-exile criticises the “preposterous” plan, adding in a statement from Dharamsala: “If the Chinese truly believe that the 14th Dalai Lama [the current one] is a ‘leading separatist who is bent on destroying the unity of the motherland’, what is the point of looking for another one?”

Venturing into the realm of the metaphysical may appear counter-intuitive for atheist United Front operatives, but all of China’s national religious organisations come under the auspices of United Front work. These include the Buddhist Association of China, the Chinese Taoist Association, the Islamic Association of China, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association and the Three-Self (Protestant) Patriotic Movement.

This portfolio means that United Front also leads China’s delicate talks to repair fractious relations with the Vatican, according to diplomats. The main sticking point is Beijing’s insistence that all religions in China must regard the Communist party as their highest authority - a position which in Catholicism is occupied by the Pope. The two sides have been ma-

noeuving, mostly in secret, for more than a decade to find common ground. There have been signs of progress in recent years, with both sides agreeing to recognise the appointment of five new Chinese bishops in 2015 and 2016.

Nevertheless, officially at least, United Front remains resistant. “We must absolutely not allow any foreign religious group or individual to interfere in our country’s religions,” the United Front book says.

➤ Growing social diversity in China has emphasised United Front’s value in maintaining loyalty and support beyond the mainstream Communist faithful

For Beijing, growing social diversity after nearly four decades of economic reform has emphasised United Front’s value in maintaining loyalty and support beyond the mainstream Communist faithful. Successive leaders have lauded United Front but none more so than Mr Xi, who made several moves in 2014 and 2015 to upgrade the status and power of the organisation.

Mr Xi has expanded the scope of United Front work, adding the ninth bureau for work in Xinjiang, meaning that organisation now oversees China’s fierce struggle against separatism in the region. He also decreed the establishment of a Leading Small Group dedicated to United Front activity, signifying a direct line of command from the politburo to United Front.

But perhaps Mr Xi’s most important step to date has been to designate United Front as a movement for the “whole party”. This has meant a sharp increase since 2015 in the number of United Front assignees to posts at the top levels of party and state. Another consequence has been that almost all Chinese embassies now include staff formally tasked with United Front work, according to officials who declined to be identified.

This has given a boost to United Front efforts to woo overseas Chinese. Even though more than 80 per cent of around 60m overseas Chinese have taken on the citizenship of more than 180 host countries, they are still regarded as fertile ground by Beijing. “The unity of Chinese at home requires the unity of the sons and daughters of Chinese abroad,” says the teaching manual.

It recommends a number of ways in which United Front operatives should win support from overseas Chinese. Some are emotional, stressing “flesh and blood” ties to the motherland. Others are ideological, focusing on a common participation in the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese people”. But mainly they are material, providing funding or other resources to selected overseas Chinese groups and individuals deemed valuable to Beijing’s cause.

One UK-based Chinese academic who has attended several United Front events describes how the experience begins with an invitation to a banquet or reception, usually from one of a host of “friendship associations” that work under the United Front banner, to celebrate dates in the Chinese calendar. Patriotic speeches set the mood as outstanding students - particularly scientists - are wooed to return to China with “sweeteners” in the form of scholarships and stipends, she adds. These stipends are funded by a number of United Front subsidiary organisations such as the China Overseas-Educated Scholars Development Foundation, according to foundation documents.

The largesse, however, may come with obligations. In Australia, the Chinese Students and Scholars Association acts to serve the political ends of the local Chinese embassy, according to Alex Joske and Wu Lebao, students at Australian National University. In one example, when Premier Li Keqiang visited Canberra this year, the CSSA fielded hundreds of Chinese students to drown out anti-China protesters on the street, Mr Joske and Mr Wu wrote in a blog.

To be clear, by no means do all Chinese students in Australia or elsewhere in the west see themselves as agents for soft power. However, Chinese and Australian academics have noted that pro-Beijing militancy is on the rise.

Feng Chongyi, professor at the University of Technology Sydney, says the influence exerted by Beijing over Chinese associations in Australia has grown appreciably since the late 1990s. “My assessment is that they control almost all the community associations and the majority of the Chinese-lan-

guage media, and now they are entering the university sector,” says Prof Feng.

Away from such grassroots operations, a bigger prize is political influence in the west. The teaching manual notes approvingly the success of overseas Chinese candidates in elections in Toronto, Canada. In 2003, six were elected from 25 candidates but by 2006 the number jumped to 10 elected from among 44 candidates, it says.

“We should aim to work with those individuals and groups that are at a relatively high level, operate within the mainstream of society and have prospects for advancement,” it says.

At times, however, the quest for political influence can go awry. New Zealand’s national intelligence agency has investigated a China-born member of parliament, Jian Yang, in connection with a decade and a half he spent at leading Chinese military colleges.

A United Front operative since 1994 Mr Yang spent more than 10 years training and teaching at elite facilities including China’s top linguistics academy for military intelligence officers, the Financial Times learnt. Between 2014 and 2016 he served on the New Zealand government’s select committee for foreign affairs, defence and trade.

Anne-Marie Brady, a professor at New Zealand’s University of Canterbury, has said China’s growing political influence should be taken seriously. Noting that Canberra is planning to introduce a law against foreign interference activities, she also called for Wellington to launch a commission to investigate Chinese political lobbying.

In 2010 the director of Canada’s national intelligence agency warned that several Canadian provincial cabinet ministers and government employees were “agents of influence” for foreign countries, particularly China. In recent months, Australia has said it is concerned about Chinese intelligence operations and covert campaigns influencing the country’s politics.

But over time, such setbacks may prove temporary hiccups in the projection of China’s brand of hard-boiled soft power around the world.

“In the beginning the Chinese government talked about culture - Peking opera, acrobatics - as soft power,” says Li Xiguang, a head of Tsinghua University’s International Center for Communication Studies. “When Xi Jinping came to power, he was totally different from previous leaders. He said China should have full self-confidence in our culture, development road, political system and theory.”

Mr Xi’s elevation of United Front’s importance and power suggests that Beijing may be unwilling to tone down its efforts.

Additional reporting by Tom Mitchell

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HEALTH

Opioid epidemic shares chilling similarities with the past

By Mike Stobbe, New York

WHILE declaring the opioid crisis a national public health emergency last week, President Donald Trump said: “Nobody has seen anything like what’s going on now.”

He was right, and he was wrong. Yes, this is the most widespread and deadly drug crisis in the nation’s history. But there has been a long string of other such epidemics, each sharing chilling similarities with today’s unfolding tragedy.

There was an outbreak after the Civil War when soldiers and others became addicted to a new pharmaceutical called morphine, one of the first of many man-made opioids. There was another in the early 1900s after a different drug was developed to help “cure” morphine addiction. It was called heroin.

Cocaine was also developed by drugmakers and sold to help morphine addiction. It cleared nasal passages, too, and became the official remedy of the Hay Fever Association. In 1910, President William H. Taft told Congress that cocaine was the most serious drug problem the nation had ever faced.

Over the next century, abuse outbreaks of cocaine, heroin, and other drugs like methamphetamine, marketed as a diet drug, would emerge and then fall back.

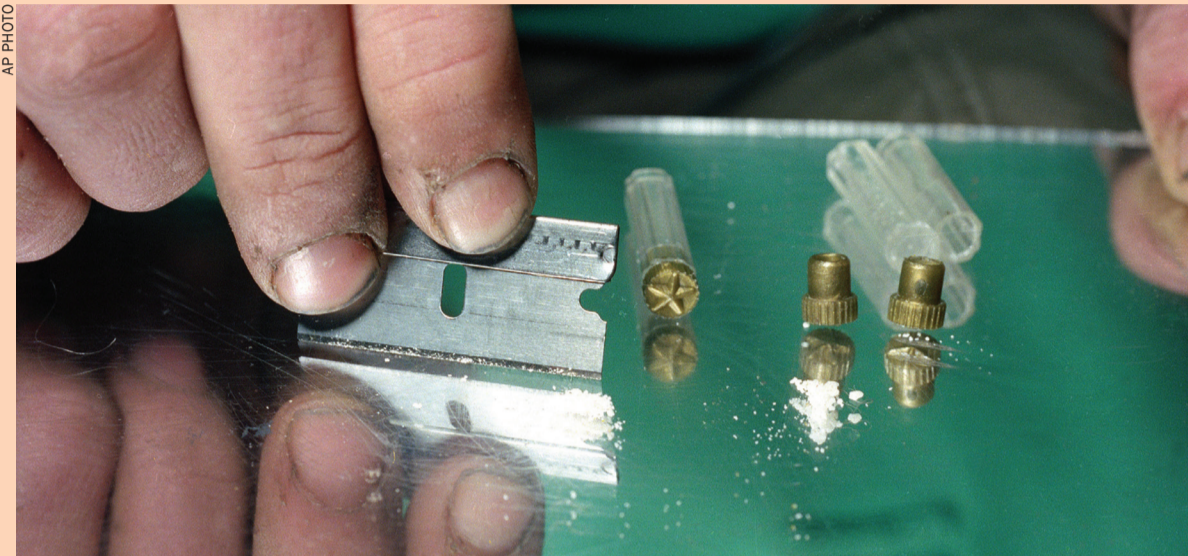
Trump vowed in his recent remarks “we will free our nation from the terrible affliction of drug abuse.” But the grim reality is that these drugs never disappear completely once they’ve emerged.

The good news, though, is that drug epidemics do fade considerably — usually because reduced supply and demand eventually diminish the number of new addictions, experts say. And that history offers some hope for the future.

1800s: BETTER AND MORE DANGEROUS MEDICINES

Most U.S. drug epidemics over the past two centuries were sparked by pharmaceutical companies and physicians pushing products that gradually proved to be addictive and dangerous. In the 1800s the drug was often opium, usually sold as a liquid in products like laudanum, and given to patients for pain or trouble sleeping. Mary Todd Lincoln, President Lincoln’s wife, took it for headaches and became addicted.

The drug was also used to get high. “Opium fiends” smoked it in opium dens like those in San Francisco’s Chinatown. Rev. Frederick Masters, a 19th century Methodist missionary, described opium dens in that city as dark, fume basements “sepulcher-like in their silence save for the sputtering of opium pi-



A razor blade is used to divide the contents of a 5 dollar vile of crack, a smokable, purified form of cocaine, at a crack house in NY

pes or the heavy breathing of their sleeping victims.”

The young nation’s drug problem grew because of morphine, a painkiller derived from opium through a chemical process that was perfected by E. Merck & Company of Germany. It made battlefield injuries more bearable for Civil War soldiers, but so many veterans got hooked that morphine addiction was sometimes called “the army disease.”

It would get worse. Cocaine and heroin were soon developed — in part to help morphine addiction.

Merck introduced cocaine, which became a prime ingredient in a variety of over-the-counter tonics for sinus problems and other ailments. Because of its energizing effects, beverage makers put it in their wines and sodas and laborers in the South sniffed it to get through grueling work shifts.

Bayer, another German pharmaceutical company, began marketing heroin in the 1890s. It often came in pill form, without prescription, and was used to treat the flu and respiratory ailments. But it came to be sniffed — and later injected — by those looking for a more intense high or a substitute for other drugs, whether it was morphine in 1905 or opioid pain pills like Vicodin in 2015.

EARLY 1900s: FROM CURE TO CURSE

In the early 1900s cocaine shifted from a consumer fad into reviled epidemic, as physicians began documenting addiction problems and police chiefs linked recreational cocaine use to prostitution and violent crime. It led to the first national effort to contain a drug epidemic: In 1914, Congress passed the Harrison Act, which said cocaine and heroin could be sold only as a prescription medicine, not in over-the-counter remedies or in consumer products.

Historians believe a growing stigma attached to cocaine use was the main reason the epidemic declined, but they say enforcement

of the Harrison Act — and its impact on prices — also was important. Cocaine and heroin got much more expensive when they were driven underground.

MID-20TH CENTURY: THE FIRST WAR ON DRUGS

Alcohol and cigarettes were — and remain — the nation’s primary addictions. Both kill far more people than drugs. But since the middle of the century, there’s been wave after wave of other drug abuse outbreaks.

Amphetamines, developed in the 1930s, took off in the 1950s. Marketed by drug companies and promoted by doctors, they were used for weight loss, anxiety and depression. Methamphetamine, developed by the Burroughs Wellcome drug company, was often prescribed as a diet pill and abused by those attracted by the surge of energy it produced. Users who injected it were known as “speed freaks.”

“The speed freak is, in many ways, an outcast in a society of outcasts. He is regarded as a fool by heroin addicts, as insane and violent by those using psychedelics and marijuana, and a ‘bust’ by non-drug using hustlers,” wrote Dr. Roger Smith, a criminologist who studied drug use in San Francisco in the late 1960s.

Greater regulation of the drugs in 1970, along with the stigma attached to speed freaks, caused the drugs to recede as others became more widely used.

Then President Richard Nixon’s 1971 “war on drugs” declaration kicked off a long period of attacking the drug problem with beefed up law enforcement and tougher sentences for users and dealers.

LATE 20TH CENTURY: COCAINE ON HIGH

Heroin use faded in the late ‘70s, but cocaine was on its way back, first in powder form and then becoming an epidemic of crack in the 1980s when a supply glut prompted dealers to sell hardened cocai-

ne rocks that sold for \$5 to \$10 on the street.

Many young thrill-seekers, wary of heroin and needles, thought crack was less dangerous because it was smoked like marijuana.

Like the heroin surge before it, crack was seen as tied to urban blight and violent crime. This triggered a new drug war, including the “this is your brain on drugs” TV spots that showed frying eggs, and harsh jail sentences for the sale and possession of crack that were far more severe than the penalties for regular cocaine.

The crack epidemic died out in the 1990s, tailing off at roughly the same time both in cities that aggressively arrested people and cities that didn’t. Experts said the police crackdown contributed, but more important was society’s growing repulsion to the drugs. Families and communities were shattered by crack-related murders and arrests. The drug’s users came to be regarded as disgraceful “crackheads.” Even risk-taking kids, looking for new highs, started to avoid crack.

TODAY’S OPIOID EPIDEMIC

In 1900, when cocaine and heroin were legal and popular, there were 250,000 Americans with a drug addiction, according to one historical estimate. That was about 1 in 300 Americans. The estimate today is 1 in 133, and the drugs are deadlier than ever.

“In all my years I’ve worked in the substance abuse field, I’ve never had so many patients die,” said Joan Hartman, vice president of behavioral health services for Illinois-based Chestnut Health Systems, who has been working in treatment for three decades.

There were fewer than 3,000 overdose deaths in 1970, when a heroin epidemic was raging in U.S. cities. There were fewer than 5,000 recorded in 1988, around the height of the crack epidemic.

More than 64,000 Americans died from drug overdoses last year, according to the U.S. Centers for

Disease Control and Prevention.

This epidemic started around 1995, kicked off by a drug called OxyContin, which like heroin and morphine before it, was meant to be a safer and more effective opioid. OxyContin and competitor drugs were designed to release the medication slowly over long periods of time, making them and supposedly safe and effective enough to use for months to treat chronic pain. But patients found themselves hooked and wanting more, and drug abusers found they could crush the tablets and snort or inject them, delivering the drug to the bloodstream much more quickly.

Aggressive marketing and distribution pushed hundreds of millions of pills into communities. Then more and more addicts turned to cheaper alternatives, bought illegally, like heroin and fentanyl, an opioid medication developed to treat intense, end-of-life pain in cancer patients that is 50 to 100 times more powerful than morphine.

“It’s a very complex epidemic” that is nowhere close to being over, said Dr. Anne Schuchat, the CDC’s principal deputy director, in an interview earlier this year.

LESSONS OF THE PAST

What has worked for previous epidemics? The supply is often reduced by a combination of regulations, law enforcement and economics. And historians say that demand slows when drug users became so outcast that even those looking for a risky thrill or a way to escape began to stay away.

Past epidemics have also shown what doesn’t work. Many experts, including some in law enforcement, say that arresting users and dealers does not seem to slow epidemics. “We cannot arrest our way out of the heroin and opioid addiction crisis,” said Brian Moran, Virginia’s secretary of public safety and homeland security, speaking at a federal hearing in July.

But while health experts want to urge people to shun drugs to reduce the number of new addictions, they say ostracizing the people already suffering from addiction does little to help them. It may even impede attempts to get people into treatment, Hartman said.

Health officials are fighting the current epidemic on three fronts: Preventing overdose deaths, helping people recover from addiction, and preventing new addictions.

There appears to be some success on the first front. The number of new addictions may be receding.

A recent federal report noted a downward trend in “opioid misuse” in adults younger than 50. Prescription rates are falling, though they remain far higher than years ago.

The other two fronts — preventing deaths and treating addiction — are not so promising, despite more attention and money flowing to programs. Deaths are still rising, and University of Pittsburgh researchers estimate as many as 300,000 will die from overdoses over the next five years. **AP**

How cities are defending themselves against sea level rise

By Wayne Parry

SUPERSTORM Sandy and a series of lesser coastal storms since that 2012 disaster compelled some coastal communities to defend themselves by elevating homes and critical infrastructure, building sand dunes, widening beaches and erecting or raising sea walls.

But as sea levels continue to rise around the world, that's not an option in large cities, where skyscrapers can't be elevated and subway and train tunnels act as turbo-charged flumes when millions of gallons of stormwater rush through them.

The answer, some cities have decided, is a mixture of hard and soft barriers; green infrastructure to capture rain and absorb storm water; temporary storage space for runoff; and drastically increased pumping measures.

Here's a look at some steps being taken by cities around the world to address the issue:

LOS ANGELES

In addition to physical barriers and widened beaches,



A sector gate on the Thames Barrier reopening for one of its monthly tests on the River Thames in east London

Los Angeles is planting trees and paving some roads with cooler surface material so that less heat is reflected. They and other cities have also baked sustainability and resiliency

concerns into municipal policies on development.

"It's a challenge and an opportunity at the same time," said Matt Petersen, who served as the city's chief sustainabili-

ty officer until earlier this year. "Infrastructure and buildings are vulnerable to sea level rise. We can't solely build our way out this this, but we can take steps to mitigate it long term.

There are 150 million Americans that are vulnerable to sea level rise, and cities need to address that."

The Port of Los Angeles recently added 152mm to the height of its proposed Wilmington Waterfront Promenade to compensate for anticipated sea level rise.

BALTIMORE

Baltimore requires new construction to have an additional two feet of elevation, and some existing buildings have been raised. The city uses bulkheads, and is integrating parks into green space flood-absorption areas. It is considering protective walls for certain vulnerable parts of the city.

LONDON

London is protected in part by a flood gate on the Thames River that can block exceptionally high tides or storm surges from the North Sea. Storm defenses were elevated for 17.7 km of the riverfront.

SHANGHAI & WUHAN

Flood gates and levees help protect the Chinese city of Shanghai. Elsewhere in China, the city of Wuhan is undergoing a test project to make it a "sponge city" capable of absorbing rain through a variety of green methods, including capturing storm water and using it for its own water needs. **AP**

ASK THE VET

by Dr Ruan Du Toit Bester



10 TYPES OF INJURIES THAT CAUSE DOG LIMPING

A dog limping does not necessarily mean he is getting up in years. It could be caused by a host of medical problems, ranging from trauma to subtle chronic conditions. A slight limp can even be a symptom of life threatening conditions, like malignant tumors. Here is a list of some of the likely causes of dog limping:

Soft tissue injury

This is the most common cause of limping for dogs. They include sprains, muscle pulls, and similar minor traumas. They are not serious, and can be successfully treated with a few days rest, and a mild analgesic.

Arthritis

If your dog has increasing difficulty with getting up after lying or sitting for some time, or trouble with climbing stairs or getting into and out of its bed, check with your vet about canine arthritis. If you have a large dog, hip dysplasia might be present.

Footpad or paw injuries

Look for cuts on the footpad. Also look for splinters or other foreign objects (thorns, sharp stones) imbedded in the footpad, or between the toes. Check for broken claws. Be alert for swelling or

other possible signs of infection in this entire area. Extreme weather conditions can also cause painful cracks in the tissue of the footpad.

Closed fracture

These injuries are bone fractures where the skin is not broken. They may not be immediately evident because the leg may not look misshapen or twisted.

Compound fractures

This is a very serious type of bone fracture where the broken bone punctures the skin. This exposure often causes dangerous infections of the bone.

Epiphyseal and greenstick fractures

Epiphyseal fractures usually occur at the end of the long bones (femur, humerus) in puppies and young dogs. These areas are called growth plates, and because they are not matured, the bone there will soften and fracture.

A greenstick fracture is a crack in the bone. The bone is otherwise intact.

Growing pains

A more scientific medical term for this complaint is Panosteitis. It is, of course, found in puppies and young dogs and usually does not need treatment.



Ligament injuries

Ligaments are the bands of muscle tissue that knit bones together at the joints. When they're injured, stability of the joint is compromised or destroyed, and your dog's limping will get progressively worse over time.

Tumors

Limping is a symptom associated with tumors in or on the bones, or in the brain or central nervous system. If you see suspicious symptoms accompanying your dog's limping, such as dizziness or disorientation, or if you find any odd lumps or masses, get your dog to the vet as soon as possible. Tumors are often life threatening, and time is of the essence.

Kneecap dislocation

Your dog's knee can adopt a sudden and dangerous side-to-side motion for various reasons, (trauma, infection) and the knee will slip out of alignment. The knee can also pop back into alignment just as quickly. Be watchful for recurring problems with this if you have a small dog.

Hope this info helps
Till next week
Dr Ruan Bester

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