



Ontario Veterinary Medical Association

Position Statements



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OVMA Position Statement – Animal Abuse

OVMA recognizes that veterinarians are in a position to observe occasions of suspected animal abuse. OVMA believes that in situations that cannot be resolved through education, it is the veterinarian's responsibility to report such observations to the appropriate authorities. The Association will seek appropriate legal protection for veterinarians when such reporting is done in good faith.

Background:

Animal abuse is the intent to cause harm and includes, but is not limited to, torture or malicious killing of animals.

Veterinarians are often the first professionals to see an abused animal. It is part of the responsibility of the veterinarian to protect the patient from further abuse. Client education may be sufficient. Repeat or serious instances should be reported to the appropriate authorities.

Studies have documented a link between the abuse of animals and the abuse of people, especially family members. Veterinarians may be able to play an important role in breaking the cycle of family violence by reporting animal abuse.

Veterinary schools are encouraged to discuss animal abuse, and the reporting thereof, in their curricula, so that graduating veterinarians are better able to recognize the signs of abuse and know the appropriate steps to take in documenting and reporting it.

Several provincial licensing bodies have amended their regulations to allow the reporting of animal abuse.

References:

1. Olson P. Recognizing and Reporting Animal Abuse: A Veterinarian's Guide. Englewood, Colorado: American Humane Association, 1998.
2. Rowan AN. Cruelty and Abuse to Animals: A Typology. In: Ascione, Arkow, eds. Animal and Human Abuse. Purdue University, 1999.

(February 5, 2014 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – Recommended Codes of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals

The process for drafting codes of practice for livestock species is supported by the federal Ministry of Agriculture and coordinated by the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies, involving representatives of agricultural industries and their organizations, federal and provincial government departments, associations of animal science, representatives of the animal welfare movement, and interested individuals.

The following codes of practice have been published:

- Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals – Pigs
- Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Farm Animals – Beef Cattle
- Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Dairy Cattle
- Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Poultry From Hatchery to Processing Plant
- Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Ranched Fox
- Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Mink
- Recommended Code of Practice for the Care and Handling of Special-fed Veal Calves

OVMA recommends that veterinarians be familiar with these codes and encourage producers to use them to promote sound animal care.

(April 12, 1995 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – Complementary and Alternative Medicine

The Ontario Veterinary Medical Association (OVMA) believes that the use of Complementary and Alternative Veterinary Medicine (CAVM) on animals constitutes the practice of veterinary medicine. The Association also holds that these therapies should only be offered in the context of a valid veterinary/client/patient relationship and that informed client consent must be obtained. Clients should be informed of conventional diagnostic and therapeutic options that are applicable and available. OVMA also believes that it is incumbent upon veterinarians who use alternative and complementary therapies to become adequately trained in their application.

The OVMA believes that all veterinary medicine, including CAVM, should be held to the same standards. Claims for safety and efficacy ultimately should be proven by the scientific method. Circumstances commonly require that veterinarians extrapolate information when formulating a course of therapy. Veterinarians should exercise caution in such circumstances. Practices and philosophies that are ineffective or unsafe should be discarded.

It is not the intent of this position statement to determine or describe the relative value of the individual modalities.

(September 24, 2014 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – Cosmetic Surgery

OVMA opposes surgical alteration of any animal for purely cosmetic purposes.

Background:

OVMA believes that cosmetic surgery is unnecessary. Surgical alterations in cases of injury or for reasons of health are not considered cosmetic. Examples of cosmetic procedures include:

- tail docking in the equine, bovine, or canine species;
- tail nicking/setting in the equine species;
- ear cropping in canine species; and
- onychectomy.

OVMA recommends that breed associations change their breed standards so that cosmetic procedures are not required.

(April 26, 2017 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – Debarking of Dogs

OVMA discourages surgical debarking of dogs unless reasonable efforts have been made to modify the dog's behaviour, those efforts have been unsuccessful, and the animal is facing euthanasia.

Background:

Debarking a dog may not correct the problem and may in fact create a worse-sounding bark due to the creation of scar tissue. If a dog is barking excessively, there is likely a behavioural problem which should be addressed before a surgical solution is considered.

(February 5, 2014 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – Electro-Immobilization

OVMA finds the use of Electro-Immobilization unacceptable.

Background:

Controlled studies on Electro-Immobilization have shown that it may cause unnecessary pain and distress and, that no significant analgesic effect is demonstrated.

(February 5, 2014 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – Euthanasia

OVMA supports policies to ensure that all animals find permanent homes as euthanasia is not an acceptable means of population control. However, when necessary, OVMA believes euthanasia must be performed humanely by properly-trained individuals.

OVMA adopts the 2013 *AVMA Guidelines for the Euthanasia of Animals* to be used as a guideline for veterinarians.

<https://www.avma.org/KB/Policies/Documents/euthanasia.pdf>

(September 24, 2014 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – Extra Label Drug Use in Food Producing Animals

Purpose:

To promote the **prudent** use of drugs in food producing animals, thereby minimizing any risks of this practice to public health and animal safety and, at the same time, contributing to effective treatment of our patients.

Background

Extra label drug use (ELDU), often referred to as “off-label use” (or intended use of any drug,) whether it is a prescription drug or over-the-counter drug, in an animal in a manner that is not in accordance with the approved label or the package insert of the drug approved by Health Canada. ELDU specifically includes the use of any approved drug that is administered at a dose, a route of administration, a frequency of administration, and duration for a disease or to a species not explicitly stated on the label of the drug. This also includes the use of all unapproved drugs, including unapproved bulk active pharmaceutical ingredients (API’s), compounded drugs - i.e. those that do not have a Canadian approved label, and drugs obtained from out of Canada for “own use” since these do not have an approved Canadian label.

ELDU is an important tool in the practice of veterinary medicine for the humane care of sick animals within a valid Veterinary-Client-Patient Relationship (VCPR), since it gives veterinary practitioners access to drugs which may be registered for human use or which may have limited registration for veterinary use. There are conditions and situations where there are no licensed products for certain things - e.g. no anesthetic products registered for swine and situations where the approved drugs are not efficacious at the label dose.

Because veterinarians are required to treat a variety of species, comparative medical and surgical abilities are part of our training. Veterinarians have had the privilege of ELDU (with which to extrapolate, experiment and determine how best to treat certain species most effectively, and) especially for situations for which this is not a licensed drug or a labeled drug is not effective.

At present, the problem is that the practice of ELDU in Canada is not confined to licensed, trained veterinarians but can be performed by a variety of people including intermediate health professionals, (pharmacists, animal health technicians) and laypersons (animal owners, livestock handlers). As a result of this practice, there are potential animal and human health risks relating to ELDU in animals – e.g. antimicrobial resistance, drug residues in food, negative effects on the animals causing pain & suffering.

ELDU has the potential to undermine Canada’s food animal industry by eroding consumer confidence and our ability to export to other countries.

OVMA Position on ELDU

OVMA takes the position that all ELDU (off label use) of biologicals and pharmaceuticals should be under the supervision of a veterinarian.

Veterinarians are the only adequately educated and trained professionals with the ability determine and manage the inherent aforementioned risks with ELDU and answer many questions regarding drug use in animals, and are personally professionally accountable for each drug administered. ELDU by veterinarians must be performed within the confines of a valid VCPR. The Canadian gFARAD (Canadian Global Food Animal Residual Avoidance Database) was established in 2002 to provide residue avoidance information to veterinarians relating to approved drugs and the practice of ELDU.

OVMA Position on Compounding

The compounding of drugs is an ancient art & science that has been practiced by health professionals, including veterinarians, for centuries. The process involves combining two or more ingredients, at least one of which is a drug, to create a final product in an appropriate form for dosing. Compounded drugs are unapproved drugs that have not undergone the Health Canada approval process and are therefore part of the ELDU issue.

Compounding is both necessary and beneficial for the treatment of veterinary patients. However, a potential exists for causing harm to animals and the public when drugs are compounded without adherence to the principles of contemporary pharmaceutical chemistry and current good compounding practices. In the absence of adequate safety, potency, and efficacy data for the use of a compounded drug in animals, the potential exists for treatment failures, and adverse reactions, including death. Furthermore, because the pharmacokinetics and residual depletion times for compounded drugs are not known, assigning an empirical withdrawal time may result in residues of concern being in food derived from treated animals.

Both the College of Veterinarians of Ontario (CVO) and the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association have position statements and guidelines for the legitimate use of compounded drugs in veterinarian practice. OVMA endorses both of these documents.

Again, the OVMA position is that veterinarians should exclusively be granted the right to prescribe compounded drugs to animals.

OVMA Position on Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs)

APIs are a substance or a mixture of substances intended to be used in the manufacture of a drug which become “active ingredients” of the drug product. APIs are not approved to be used directly as drugs. Nevertheless, bulk active pharmaceuticals have been sold to farmers, pharmacists, feed mill operators, retailers, and veterinarians for direct administration to animals.

This poses a significant public health issue, given the potential risks to the public from exposure to drug residues in food derived from treated animals.

A federal government policy published in 1999 specifies that the sale of API's for direct administration to animals makes those administering them subject to the licensing, quality, safety, and efficacy requirements, applicable to veterinary drugs in the "Food and Drug Act and Regulations."

The OVMA position is that API's should only be allowed to be used for food animals under the direct supervision of a veterinarian. The producer would need to have a prescription from a veterinarian to purchase an API from any source. The veterinarian would need to have a valid VCPR. The veterinarian would take responsibility for the use of the drug in the animal(s) for which it is prescribed.

OVMA takes the position that the distribution and administration of any API that is not under documented veterinary supervision should be discontinued and made illegal.

OVMA Position of Drugs Imported for "Own Use"

The importation of three months' supply of medicine was to be a consideration given to immigrating people allowing them to bring necessary health products into the country until they could establish themselves within the Canadian health care system. It was not intended to allow people to repeatedly import three months supply of medicine, not only for themselves but also for their livestock.

This "own use loophole" has been abused by livestock owners for years, and needs to be closed. This policy allowing unsupervised extra label drug use puts our export markets in jeopardy and the safety of food animals at risk. It undermines Canadian animal health pharmaceutical companies and the veterinary profession. Allowing the own use loophole to continue to exist also undermines the importance and function of the Veterinary Drug Directorate.

OVMA urges the Province of Ontario and the Government of Canada to prohibit the importation of any medicine intended for use in animals using the "own-use" provision.

OVMA Position Regarding Ontario Livestock and Medicines Outlets (LMO's)

In Ontario, there are licensed outlets for the sale of a limited number of injectable and water soluble antibiotics. These were established to ensure the availability of livestock medicines to all food animal farmers, even in remote areas where accessing veterinary supplies maybe difficult. These outlets are not licensed to dispense any advice regarding the medication they are selling. They do not handle compounded drugs, API's or imported not licensed in Canada drugs. Therefore, it may be argued that they are not contributing to the ELDU issue.

However, there are some statistics that suggest the distribution of antimicrobial drugs through over the counter outlets like Ontario's LMO, is less than ideal.

- 15% of producers seek professional advice on how to use these products.
- 16% of disease is zoonotic, that is, capable of being spread from animal species to humans.

- All antimicrobial use can lead to resistance.

Since antimicrobials sold through an LMO are not under direct veterinary supervision, they could be used improperly and thereby be part of or contribute to animal and human health safety issues (the extra label drug use problem.)

OVMA supports the position that veterinarians be the sole distributors of all veterinary injectable and water soluble pharmaceuticals and biologicals, and that these medications be administered only under veterinary supervision. Veterinarians would then be professionally responsible for the prudent use of these products.

(September 24, 2008 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – Standard Operating Procedure “Handling of Game Birds at Field Trial Events”

OVMA does not endorse the use of live game birds for training and field trial events and encourages ongoing efforts to investigate effective alternatives. OVMA commends the efforts of Dr. Bailey and Dr. Gillingham for producing the Standard Operating Procedure "Handling of Game Birds for Field Trial Events." It is hoped that the adoption of these procedures will increase the humane treatment of game birds by user groups.

(December 13, 1995 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – Keeping Other Animals as Pets

Some people select other animals as pets. These animals have specific needs (behavioural, environmental, social and nutritional) that must be met. Responsible pet ownership practices are no less important.

All the following criteria should be taken into account when considering other animals as pets:

- Species ownership is supported by the existence of published information pertinent to its proper animal husbandry and veterinary care requirements
- Species ownership does not pose a significant threat to public health and safety
- The species in question does not represent a significant threat to native (indigenous) wildlife populations
- Species ownership is permitted under provincial, federal or international laws and regulations, such as the following:

Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Canada is a signatory party. Wild Animal and Plant Protection and Regulation of International and Interprovincial Trade Act (WAPPRIITA). Federal statute administered by Environment Canada (Canadian Wildlife Service) At the provincial level, pertinent regulations usually fall under the Ministry of Agriculture and/or Ministry of Natural Resources (Fish and Game Department) NOTE: Information on all these regulations can be obtained from the local provincial conservation officer or game warden.

(February 5, 2014 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – Microchipping

OVMA supports the permanent identification of animals, and recommends electronic implants using the International Standards Organization (ISO) standard microchip technology.

As implantation technique and type of microchip can impact on microchip performance, OVMA recommends that implantation of microchips only be carried out by veterinarians or qualified persons knowledgeable regarding the procedure and this system of identification, in accordance with the OVMA Guidelines for Electronic Identification.

OVMA encourages all Ontario mixed and small animal veterinary practices to have acquired a microchip reader capable of reading both ISO and Canadian Standard microchips.

(September 24, 2014 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – Off-Leash Dog Parks

The Ontario Veterinary Medical Association (OVMA) supports retaining existing and creating new off-leash community dog parks when such parks are developed and utilized appropriately and responsibly. Off-leash parks offer dogs (and their owners) the opportunity to engage in activities that improve their overall health and well-being through exercise and socialization.

Characteristics of appropriate and responsible off-leash dog parks include, but are not limited to:

- The area is specifically designated for off-leash dogs and suitable measures (e.g. the installation of adequate fencing) have been taken to protect others that may be in the area.
- The park provides dogs with enough room to run freely.
- The park is regularly inspected to ensure that there are no potential hazards (e.g. broken glass, kill-traps, etc.) to the dogs' health and well-being.
- The park provides appropriate waste receptacles.
- Appropriate rules governing the use of the park have been adopted and are clearly indicated on park signage. At a minimum, park rules should include:
 - A warning to all owners that they are responsible for their dog(s) and are required to understand that there are risks of disease and injury involved with leash-free parks.
 - Requiring park users to monitor their dog's activities and ensure that their dogs are not left unattended at any time.
 - Requiring that all dogs using the park have a valid rabies vaccination certificate and recommending owners discuss prevention of infectious disease and parasite control with their veterinarian.
 - Requiring park users to remove any solid waste deposited by their dog(s).
 - Requiring owners who know their dog to be aggressive to refrain from taking their dog into the park.

(February 5, 2014 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – Partial Digital Amputation (Onychectomy or Declawing) of the Domestic Felid

OVMA endorses the CVMA position statement on Partial Digital Amputation:

Position:

OVMA opposes elective and non-therapeutic Partial Digital Amputation (PDA), commonly known as declawing or onychectomy, of domestic cats.

Summary:

- Scratching is a normal behaviour in cats.
- OVMA views non-therapeutic PDA as ethically unacceptable when performed without comprehensive client education including a thorough review of available alternatives, as the surgery has the potential to cause unnecessary and avoidable pain and alternatives to PDA are available.
- Veterinarians should educate clients about strategies that provide alternatives to PDA.

Background

1. Scratching is a normal feline behaviour. It is a means for cats to mark their territory both visually and with scent, and assists with nail conditioning and whole body stretching. Nails are used by cats to assist with balance, climbing, and self-defence.
2. Partial digital amputation (PDA) is the surgical removal of the third phalanx of each digit. Non-therapeutic PDA is generally performed for the convenience of the owner to eliminate the ability of a cat to cause damage from scratching. The surgery typically involves the digits of the front paws, although surgery on the digits of all four paws is sometimes undertaken.
3. Veterinarians strive to use their scientific knowledge to promote animal health and welfare and relieve animal suffering in keeping with the principles of veterinary medical ethics (1). With or without concrete scientific evidence, ethical consideration has to be given to the welfare of the animal. Veterinarians need to consider what advantages non-medically driven PDA's offer to the feline. Viable alternatives to PDAs exist. Therefore from an ethical viewpoint, the OVMA views this surgery as unacceptable as it offers no advantage to the feline and the lack of scientific evidence leaves us unable to predict the likelihood of long-term behavioural and physical negative side effects.
4. OVMA recognizes that appropriate medical therapy may necessitate surgery, including PDA (2). Medically necessary PDA surgery may include, but is not restricted to, biopsy of a nail or phalanx or surgery to treat: neoplasia of nail bed or phalanges, severe or irreversible trauma, immune-mediated disease affecting nail bed, paronychia

(inflammation or infection), onychodystrophy (abnormal formation), onychogryphosis (hypertrophy and abnormal curvature), onychomadesis (sloughing), onychomalacia (softening), onychomycosis (fungal infection), or onychoschizia (splitting) (3).

5. Surgical amputation of the third phalanx of the digit alters the expression of normal behaviours in cats, causes avoidable short-term acute pain, and has the potential to cause chronic pain and negative long-term orthopedic consequences (2,4-7).
6. As with any surgery, PDA can result in complications due to adverse reactions to anesthetics, hemorrhage, infection, and lack of effective perioperative pain management.
7. Since the third phalanx is removed by PDA, cats must thereafter bear their weight on the second phalanx. This fact has implicated PDA as a cause of lameness. It is recognized, however, that lameness is difficult to diagnose and detect (5). For this and other reasons the long term orthopedic effects of PDA are poorly understood.
8. A recent long-term study assessed cats six months after PDA (6,7). No significant differences were found between cats that had undergone bilateral forelimb onychectomy with successful outcomes and cats that had not. Specifically no differences were noted in peak vertical force and vertical impulse, the most commonly evaluated parameters in kinetic gait analysis, when measured at least 6 months after surgery. Since the original study only considered cats with successful surgical outcomes, the results likely have limited application and generalizability.
9. Both acute and chronic pain in felines can result in an increase in behaviours such as inappropriate elimination, excessive vocalization and increased aggression. The OVMA believes that current studies on long-term behavioural effects as a result of PDA are insufficient to draw firm conclusions about its role in causing chronic pain. The CVMA will therefore continue to review new studies as they are published (8,9).
10. It has been suggested that PDA be performed on cats in order to decrease the health risk to immunocompromised humans. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention does not list PDA as a means of preventing disease in either healthy or immunocompromised individuals (10).
11. There are currently no peer-reviewed studies that identify a higher rate of relinquishment of cats with intact claws *versus* cats that have undergone PDA, including in countries in which PDAs have been banned. Partial digital amputation is not considered to be a justifiable alternative to relinquishment (11).
12. Tendonectomy is not an acceptable alternative to PDA because it causes similar pain post-surgery (8) and could lead to increased complications if the nails are not properly maintained.
13. Veterinarians should educate their clients about reasonable and effective alternatives to PDA including providing advice on the design and location of scratching posts and other

suitable scratching materials and approaches aimed at preventing aggressive play behaviours.

14. Other strategies that offer alternatives to PDA include:

- feline pheromone sprays to redirect the cat to more desirable scratching materials;
- double-sided tape to deter cats from scratching the edges of furniture;
- regular nail trimming (recommended every two weeks);
- artificial nail covers;
- environmental enrichment and appropriate daily play to decrease feline aggression;
- avoidance of hand/foot play which can lead the cat to see these human parts as prey;
- the application of basic principles of reinforcement of desirable behaviour, including the use of catnip, treats, and verbal praise.

15. Partial digital amputation procedures are currently banned in several countries and/or regions including the United Kingdom (e.g., Ireland, England), Europe, and Australia.

16. In the current absence of a legislated ban on PDA surgery in Canadian jurisdictions, the OVMA, though opposed to elective and non-therapeutic PDA, supports the actions of provincial veterinary governing bodies that require that veterinarians, as a minimum, provide clients with information regarding PDA surgery, potential side-effects, and alternatives that is sufficient for owners to give informed consent (12).

17. Veterinarians have the right to refuse to perform non-therapeutic PDA surgery. If alternatives fail to alleviate undesirable scratching behaviours, veterinarians have the right and responsibility to use professional judgement for a humane and ethical outcome.

(April 26, 2017 Board)

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OVMA Position Statement – Pet Overpopulation

OVMA recognizes that pet overpopulation is of major concern both with regard to animal and human welfare. Animal welfare issues include undue suffering encountered by homeless, domestic animals as a result of poor housing, nutrition and improper health care as well as the needless euthanasia of unwanted pets. Human welfare concerns include potential health hazards, secondary to zoonotic diseases and injuries inflicted by aggressive animals, as well as the social conflicts relating to our responsibilities towards domestic animals. OVMA commends the work that has been done, and is still ongoing in the investigation of this problem, by a variety of animal welfare groups including, but not limited to, humane organizations, municipal animal control bodies, the veterinary profession and a variety of animal rights groups. As a result of these ongoing efforts, OVMA recognizes that the pet overpopulation problem is multi-factorial in its etiology. Any pet population is affected by birth rate, death rate, pet relinquishment/abandonment, the population structure of pets, the roaming tendencies of animals from one geographic area to another as well as human demographics and attitudes (Ref. #1). As such, any solution to the pet overpopulation problem must also be multi-factorial, with the realization that there is no simple, single-faceted, panacea approach. Therefore, it is the opinion of OVMA that efforts directed towards solving this problem must address the following 5 main areas:

1. Animal Control and Legislation
2. Pet Sterilization
3. Education
4. Data Collection and Critical Assessment
5. A Cooperative Approach

1. Animal Control And Legislation

a) This requires the drafting, implementation and enforcement of animal control laws that are fair and equitable, but still act as a deterrent against irresponsible pet ownership. These laws should address the following areas:

- i) Public safety requirements (ie. appropriate pet restraint and control)
- ii) Public health provisions (ie. mandatory rabies vaccination and "pooper scooper" laws)
- iii) Nuisance abatement provisions (ie. noise infractions, property damage, wandering pets)
- iv) Animal welfare (ie. animal cruelty) (Ref. #2)

OVMA supports the principles reflected in CVMA's Sample Municipal Bylaws Regulating the Keeping and Controlling of Companion Animals.

b) To effectively enforce the animal control laws as outlined in a) above, commitment must be made towards providing the personnel, funds and equipment to do so.

c) To better allow for the enforcement of the animal control laws as outlined in a) above, consideration should be made for a mandatory pet identification program. Pet identification must be permanent and this can be accomplished by the implantation of a subcutaneous electronic transponder. Consideration may also be given for the incorporation of the electronic pet ID as part of the municipal licensing program.

d) Adoption of female unwanted pets would be made easier, and the risk for unwanted pregnancy less, if information was available, at the time of adoption, as to whether they had been sterilized already. This may be facilitated by the above electronic pet ID program.

e) There should be a differential fee schedule for the licensing of intact versus neutered (refers to surgical sterilization of either males or females) pets, as well as the establishment of realistic fines for infractions to existing animal control laws. These fines should be structured to act as a deterrent and money brought in through the implementation of such a fee schedule could be used to finance the guidelines outlined in a), b) and c) above.

f) Any animal control laws and legislation, to be effective, must apply to both the feline and canine population.

g) OVMA recognizes that effective animal control policies can have a dramatically positive impact on the pet overpopulation problem. (Ref. #3, 4)

2. Pet Sterilization

a) Rendering an animal incapable of bearing offspring can be done by three main methods:

i) Pet confinement during key stages of the reproductive cycle

ii) Pharmacological suppression of the physiological events that support conception and pregnancy

iii) Surgical removal, or alteration of the male or female reproductive tract to prevent conception and pregnancy

As there are currently no pharmacological methods that will render an animal sterile for life (Ref. #5) and methods i) and ii) outlined above rely heavily on owner compliance, they should not be considered as reliable methods of pregnancy prevention. As such, surgical sterilization currently represents the most reliable method of ensuring sterility for the lifespan of the animal and

therefore is recommended as an integral part of the solution to the pet overpopulation problem.

b) OVMA recognizes that it has been well documented that surgical sterilization programs are an ineffective means of animal population control when used as a single solution approach. (Ref. #2, 6)

c) Furthermore, there is no substantive data to support that low cost spay/neuter programs result in an increase in pet sterilization (Ref. #2). This point is further supported in light of the fact that sterilization procedures done through these clinics account for less than 10% of the total sterilization procedures performed. (Ref. #7). Experience dictates that many such programs are utilized by members of the pet owning public who can well afford sterilization procedures through accredited veterinary facilities. Therefore, these programs often miss the very individuals they are targeted for. This emphasizes the need for public awareness and education of these programs. Further data from humane societies also demonstrates that less than 60% of pets adopted are sterilized despite monetary incentives, indicating there are other factors owners take into account in deciding about sterilization for their pet (ie. religious, philosophical and psychological). (Ref. #7, 8, 9)

d) Realizing that surgical sterilization is an integral part of the strategy to alleviate the pet overpopulation problem, and realizing that such a surgical procedure must be performed by a licensed veterinarian in an accredited veterinary facility, it is recommended that every effort be made by both the local veterinary community and the agencies involved, to develop a mutually agreeable solution to offer pet sterilization through existing veterinary facilities. This cooperative approach could also make use of the veterinarian's standing in the community as a role model and educator.

e) OVMA supports further investigation into the sterilization of all pets prior to leaving a humane shelter or animal control facility, regardless of age. Current studies support this concept as effective and without any undue additional health hazards to the animal concerned. (Ref. #10, 11, 12)

f) The term "low cost" when applied to spay/neuter clinics, implies exorbitant fees charged for similar services provided by private veterinary facilities. This gives a false impression, especially in light of the fact that low cost sterilization programs are subsidized by charitable or municipal dollars. (Ref. #9, 13) Therefore, OVMA recommends the term "subsidized sterilization" or "subsidized spay/neuter clinic" be used in its place.

3. Education

a) OVMA recognizes that most animals in shelter environments are not puppies or kittens, but animals in the 1-2 years of age range. (Ref. #2) These animals have either been abandoned or relinquished by their owners. Within 1 year of ownership, approximately 35% of cats are no longer in their original homes and, for dogs, approximately 33% have been given away and another 33% surrendered to animal

shelters or pounds. (Ref. #7, 14) One of the most common reasons for pet abandonment/relinquishment is behavioural problems including unrealistic expectations of their pets by the pet owner. (Ref. #15) As these are primarily manifestations of a lack of proper education, principally in the areas of pet selection and pet rearing/training, education is an integral part of the pet overpopulation solution.

Also, since many behavioural problems are manifested as a secondary sexual characteristic in sexually intact, mature animals, pet sterilization and the awareness of the pet owning public as to its benefits in curbing these behaviours is essential.

b) OVMA recognizes that pet ownership is a privilege, not a right. As stated by one author "companion animals are kept to bond with human beings, to give and receive love, loyalty and companionship, and to enrich and deepen the texture of one's life. The nature of the relationship in its ideal form is not one of exploitation and profit, but of reciprocity and responsibility."(Ref. #16) Education programs should strive to teach this ideal.

c) OVMA recognizes that educating the public in regards to the responsibilities of pet ownership is the responsibility of all groups involved in animal welfare (ie. humane groups, municipal control agencies and the veterinary profession) as well as public educators (ie. teachers). (Ref. #3, 16, 17)

4. Data Collection and Critical Assessment

a) To make data collection and assessment more valuable, specific working definitions are required for pet overpopulation, normal carrying capacities for pets in a given community, and normal birth and death rates among standing feline/canine populations. (Ref. #2)

b) A variety of data collection methods are available ranging from simple record keeping of animals seen through humane groups and animal control agencies to complex models encompassing all aspects of a specific animal population. (Ref. #1, 18) Regardless of how complex the system employed, critical assessment of data is invaluable in defining not only the dynamics of the pet population in study, but also to evaluate the effects of various methods being employed to address the overpopulation problem. (Ref. #4) Without critical assessment, any future recommendations will be based on supposition and conjecture and not specific facts, further fuelling the ongoing controversy as to what is the best solution and as such preventing a cohesive effort with tangible results.

5. A Cooperative Approach

Finally, and in conclusion, it is the opinion of OVMA that the aforementioned measures will be far more successful if a working relationship can be developed between humane groups, animal control agencies, the veterinary profession, legislators, epidemiologists and educators. Once this relationship can be established, and a commitment is made by all parties involved to all of the aforementioned measures, will the problem of pet overpopulation ever be truly addressed and a solution found.

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(February 5, 2014 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – Pet Spay and Neuter

OVMA strongly recommends sterilization of all cats and dogs not intended for breeding, in order to reduce pet overpopulation, as euthanasia is not an acceptable means of population control. Promotion of responsible pet ownership via client education is vital and should include messaging stating that sterilization is part of being a responsible owner.

Cats: OVMA supports the use of early spay and neuter programs by animal shelters to sterilize cats before adoption to address cat overpopulation. OVMA strongly supports spay and neuter prior to 5 months of age as the method of sterilization of all non-breeding cats.

Dogs: OVMA recognizes that because early spay and neuter could have negative consequences for certain breeds of dogs, the age and methodology (including spay/neuter, vasectomy, hysterectomy, tubal ligation) of sterilization should be individualized by the owner or shelter in consultation with a veterinarian.

(April 26, 2017 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – Pin Firing in Horses

OVMA discourages the practice of firing soft tissue injuries to horses limbs, however, OVMA recognizes the right of practitioners to exercise their professional judgment while acting in the best interest of a particular horse. The procedure and aftercare must be done in a humane manner.

(September 15, 1993 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – Rabies Clinics

OVMA opposes the holding of rabies clinics unless there is epidemiological evidence in and area of the province to support them. OVMA recommends that plans for these clinics be worked out locally between the local veterinary association and the health unit. OVMA recommends that such plans be established in abundance of an incident which presents the need for clinics. It is recommended that prices for clinics be negotiated locally. Where sufficient epidemiological evidence exists to warrant a rabies clinic, OVMA supports, as an alternative, the use of a form of voucher system similar to that implemented in Halton Region, conditional upon setting of the fee at an acceptable price.

Background:

OVMA is recommending that rabies clinics in Ontario be eliminated unless there is epidemiological evidence that they are required, for several reasons:

- 1) The health of pets being vaccinated may be endangered, or the vaccine may not be effective, because no physical examination takes place before the vaccination is given.

A physical examination should always be performed on a pet before a vaccination is given, for a variety of reasons.

- Rabies vaccinations should never be given to pregnant animals, as maternally-derived antibodies will interfere with the vaccine.
- The pet may be suffering from an immunosuppressive ailment, and become ill as a result of the vaccine.
- Concurrent illness, chemotherapy treatments, or certain drugs (e.g. tetracycline) may inhibit the immune response to the vaccine, rendering it ineffective.

To rule out these possibilities, the vaccination should be administered only after a veterinarian has thoroughly examined the animal and reviewed its medical records. As physical examinations are not performed in rabies clinics, and as the animal's health records are not available, the animal's health may be put at risk, or the vaccine may not produce the desired immunity, if the animal is vaccinated in a rabies clinic.

- 2) The annual nature of rabies clinics increases the risk of contracting rabies for dogs under one year of age.

The availability of annual rabies clinics unfortunately leads some pet owners not to vaccinate their pets until the next rabies clinic. As a result, a significant number of pets are left unprotected from this deadly disease while their owners wait for the next low cost

clinic. Many pets are not vaccinated because they are either too young, or missed the last clinic and have to wait an extended period for the next opportunity. In this case, the unprotected animal is at risk until the next rabies clinic.

- 3) Rabies clinics mislead the public into thinking that an annual rabies vaccination is all there is to pet care, and decrease the likelihood that health problems will be detected at an early stage.

By the very nature of rabies clinics, the attending veterinarian does not assess the health of the animal, and does not check or vaccinate for other diseases. In areas where rabies clinics are popular, the lack of regular pet health maintenance makes the pet population at risk for panleukopenia and parvovirus infection. Taking rabies vaccinations away from rabies clinics and putting them into private veterinary clinics would help ensure all pets are receiving regular health maintenance.

Under the Halton voucher system, pet owners may obtain a low cost rabies vaccination voucher from the Regional Health Unit after signing a declaration that they cannot afford to pay for a physical examination plus vaccinations. The pet owner then takes the voucher to any veterinary clinic in the region. Upon presentation of the voucher and payment of the required fee, the pet owner may obtain a rabies vaccination without paying for or obtaining a physical examination.

(February 5, 2014 Board)

OVMA Position Statement – Recumbent Farm Animals

OVMA is seriously concerned with the present lack of consistent standards for the humane care and disposition of 'downer animals,' hereafter referred to as recumbent animals in this document. A recumbent farm animal is any farm animal which, due to old age, injury, metabolic or systemic disease, etc. is unable to raise itself without assistance to a standing and walking state.

Several problems have been identified with the handling and treatment of such animals on farms, on transport vehicles, and at stockyards and slaughter plants. Of paramount importance is the humane treatment of the animal in a timely, efficient and effective manner. Decisions on the disposition of these animals must be made on humane grounds.

In an effort to establish some recommendations for veterinarians as to the treatment and disposition of recumbent animals, the following guidelines have been developed.

Requirements for Recumbent Animals:

a) Housing

- i. Comfortable housing that ensures protection from hard and rough surfaces in an effort to reduce the incidence of decubitus pressure sores, abrasions etc.
- ii. Adequate footing (ie. non-slip flooring).
- iii. Sufficient space to provide enough room to roll the animal regularly.
- iv. Shelter from the elements.

b) Management of the Animal

- i. A recumbent animal must be turned regularly to minimize sequelae common to this condition.
- ii. Where it remains in the animals' best interest to be moved, movement must be done in a humane fashion (See Appendix 1).
- iii. Dragging of the animal is not permitted except in emergency situations.
- iv. Dragging refers to attaching a chain, or rope to part of the animal's body and pulling it along the ground and/or onto a vehicle.
- v. An emergency situation would be where the animal must be moved to alleviate its distress, provide emergency treatment, or ensure public safety (Moving the animal must be done as humanely as possible. Padded belts or straps should be attached to the non-injured limbs, but never the head or neck, and the move should be limited to the shortest possible distance).
- vi. Fresh food and water must be provided and be readily available to the animal.

c) Condition of the Animal

The condition of the animal must be evaluated by a veterinarian to ensure that:

- i. The animal is eating and drinking adequate quantities.
- ii. The animal is maintaining body condition.
- iii. There is no evidence of undue suffering or distress.

d) Disposition of Recumbent Animals

Where there is a persistent lack of response to treatment, or the veterinarian deems that continuation of treatment would be inhumane, a prompt decision should be made on the disposition of the animal:

- i. Where the animal is not fit for slaughter, the veterinarian must advise that the animal be euthanized in a humane fashion.
- ii. Where the animal is fit for slaughter, it should be transported directly to the slaughter plant in a manner that minimizes pain and distress to the animal.

e) Recommendations

- i. An identification system for recumbent animals should be developed to ensure that these animals can be tracked following removal from the farm.
- ii. There could be a special identification tag that would be the responsibility of veterinarians to attach to affected animals to ensure proper processing, and prevent substandard meat from being used for human consumption.

Appendix 1

The apparatus or equipment for moving recumbent animals and the techniques used will vary with the size and weight of the animals involved (Some examples are listed below).

The animals must be restrained by straps, ropes, or by hand, to prevent injury. Adequate help is a pre-requisite.

Smaller animals may be loaded onto:

- a) a modified two-wheeled hand cart that has a large platform;
- b) a wheel barrow;
- c) the bucket of a front-end loader or skid steer;
- d) a canvas tarp that can be lifted by the corners;

Larger animals may be moved by:

- a) rolling them onto a piece of conveyor belt, stone boat, sheet of plywood, or canvas that has a tow cable attached to the ends, that will enable it to be towed or winched;
- b) rolling onto a reinforced steel or wood pallet and then lifted and moved by a forklift;
- c) specialized hoists such as a "Cow Caddy" that has a steel framework that is placed on either side of the animal - the animal is then winched up by the suspending belts under the chest and abdomen - the wheels of the frame allow the animal to be rolled along.

(September 15, 1993 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – Routine Surgical Procedures of Farm Animals

Regarding castration of cattle, swine, sheep and goats; tail docking of swine and sheep; and dehorning of cattle and goats; OVMA recommends that if necessary these procedures be performed at the earliest age practicable. Where indicated, appropriate analgesics and/or anaesthetics should be used.

(February 16, 1995 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – The Use of Strychnine as a Pesticide

OVMA is opposed to the use of strychnine for pest control.

Background:

Humane consideration should be given to the licensing of all pesticides in Canada. The ingestion of strychnine results in uncontrollable seizures and death by asphyxiation. This is an inhumane means of pest control.

(February 5, 2014 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – The Trapping of Fur-Bearing Animals

OVMA does not support the use of trapping devices which may cause excessive pain and physical injury. It is the position of the OVMA that any live-holding device must be checked at least every twenty-four hours.

OVMA is opposed to limb-holding traps that could cause injury, or killing-type traps, being set outdoors in residential areas because of the risk to domestic animals and children.

OVMA encourages the education of trappers, and the further development of humane traps.

OVMA supports the ongoing development of national and international trapping standards.

(December 11, 1991 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – Use of Animals in Entertainment and Recreation

Position

The Ontario Veterinary Medical Association (OVMA) accepts the use of animals in entertainment and recreation only when the animals' physical, social, and behavioural needs are being met. OVMA opposes activities, contests, or events that have a high probability of causing injury, distress, or illness.

Background

- 1) OVMA recognizes that concerns surrounding the use of animals for the purposes of entertainment and recreation may arise if the physical, social, or behavioural needs of animals are not being met (1-5).
 - a. Examples of animal use for entertainment and recreation include, but are not limited to, zoos, aquariums and other animal exhibitions; animals used for media purposes, circuses, rodeos; and equestrian and other competitive sporting events involving animals.
 - b. Animals performing, or on display in a traveling or static environment, may receive inadequate attention to their physical, social, and behavioural needs.
 - i. This can occur due to close confinement, lack of exercise and other physical requirements, inability to express natural behaviours, and/or lack of appropriate socialization and mental stimulation.
 - ii. The development of stereotypes is an outcome of such impoverished environments or conditions.
- 2) In all areas where animals are kept or used, humane and ethical treatment must be paramount, and animals must be portrayed and utilized with respect (1, 6, 7).
 - a. Entertainment and recreational activities should use animals that are appropriately bred, raised, habituated, and trained.
 - b. Animals should not be forced to perform actions or tasks that result in physical or mental distress or discomfort.
 - c. Activities that portray or force animals to perform in ways not characteristic of the species should be discouraged, so as not to harm the animal or mislead the public as to the true nature of the animal.
 - d. Training methods should be based on positive reinforcement, utilizing natural behaviours.
- 3) OVMA recommends that all animals used for entertainment or recreation receive appropriate veterinary care by suitably experienced veterinarians. A veterinarian should be responsible for overseeing any competitive events where animal injury is possible.

- 4) The indiscriminant use of performance-enhancing drugs, or procedures that alter the conformation or function of animals for the purpose of competition is unacceptable.
- 5) OVMA strongly supports the development of species appropriate indices of animal health and welfare during sporting and entertainment usage (7-13).
- 6) OVMA advocates for the development and adoption of national standards for the management, husbandry, and transport of animals used for entertainment or recreation.

(April 24, 2013 Board)

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OVMA Position Statement – The Use of Animals in Research, Teaching and Testing

OVMA recognizes the need to use animals for research, teaching, and testing purposes to improve the overall well-being of humans and animals, when there are no scientifically acceptable replacement alternatives, and when the studies have been shown to be scientifically and ethically justified. OVMA recognizes and upholds the Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC) program. Animal-based studies should be carried out in accordance with CCAC guidelines and policies by institutions holding a valid CCAC Certificate of Good Animal Practice®

Background:

As a caring profession, veterinarians are trained to prevent pain and suffering in animals and to enhance their physical and behavioural well-being. The CCAC system of overseeing the use of animals in research, teaching, and testing is based on institutional animal care committees and on the Russell and Burch tenet of the “3 Rs” (Reduction, Refinement, Replacement). Animals should only be used if the researcher's best efforts to find a replacement alternative have failed. Those using animals should employ the most humane methods on the smallest number of appropriate animals required to obtain valid information. The CCAC Certificate of Good Animal Practice® indicates that an institution meets the national standards for the care and use of animals for research, teaching, and testing in Canada, including laboratory animals, wildlife, and farm animals.

(February 5, 2014 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – The Use of Coupons to Promote Pharmaceutical Products

OVMA does not oppose the use of coupons to promote veterinary pharmaceutical products, under the following conditions:

- the coupons are not handed out by clinic staff or made available through clinic displays;
- the veterinary clinic is not required to redeem the coupon; and
- the coupon provides the purchaser with a rebate on the cost of purchasing the product, not on the cost of veterinary services.

OVMA does not oppose the use of coupons to promote pet food and other retail products, under the following conditions:

- the veterinary clinic is not required to redeem the coupon; and
- the coupon provides the purchaser with a rebate on the cost of purchasing the product, not on the cost of veterinary services.

(February 5, 2014 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – The Use of Pound Animals in Medical Research

OVMA recognizes that research involving the use of pound source animals is necessary in cases where these animals are the most appropriate models, when there are no scientifically acceptable replacement alternatives, and when the studies have been shown to be scientifically and ethically justified.

OVMA encourages universities and other research institutions that use pound source animals to ensure that animals have been held for at least five working days and that reasonable efforts have been made to find their owners prior to making the animals available for research.

Each year a small percentage of unwanted animals, which would otherwise be destroyed in pounds, are released according to the provisions of the Ontario *Animals for Research Act* to Universities and other research institutions for use in essential Biomedical Research.

The Act allows the acquisition of unwanted animals from pounds while recognizing the right of the pound-keepers to maintain these animals on their premises in hopes of adoption.

If these pound source animals were not available, there would be a need to breed and rear additional animals solely for these purposes adding not only to the loss of more animal lives but also the creation of large dog rearing farms and the inherent problems that may result.

At a time when thousands of unwanted dogs and cats are killed annually in pounds, additional animal death is unjustifiable.

(February 5, 2014 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – Vaccination

The best way to combat any disease is to prevent it. Vaccination is the key to preventing many infectious diseases in our companion animals. Diseases such as distemper, parvovirus, panleukopenia and hepatitis are much easier to prevent than to treat. A disease such as rabies is fatal to all animals and it is a risk to humans.

As veterinarians, it is important for us to continually question and improve upon our vaccination protocols. OVMA believes that most veterinarians and pharmaceutical companies are truly committed to providing the best vaccines and vaccination protocols to assist in preventing infectious diseases in our companion animals. To stop vaccinating, in our opinion, would put animals at risk of succumbing to a number of infectious diseases.

OVMA encourages all animal owners to consider and discuss, with their veterinarian, the pros (advantages) and cons (potential side effects) of each vaccine with regard to their animal's individual needs. Consideration should be given to the animal's age, breed, sex, environment, and health status. The veterinarian should also consider the risk of exposure to the disease, the seriousness of the disease in question, and the incidence and severity of side effects associated with the vaccine.

Vaccines and their protocols are currently under examination and will continue to evolve as our knowledge and experience grows. The American Association of Feline Practitioners' feline vaccination protocols and the American Animal Hospital Association's canine vaccination protocols are the most comprehensive and significant reviews to date, and OVMA encourages members to review these protocols. Vaccination carries with it both benefits and risks. It is the responsibility of each and every veterinarian to weigh the risk of each and every vaccine and try to attain the best balance in the interests of the health and protection of the animal.

(February 5, 2014 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – Velveting of Deer

OVMA recommends amputation of the growing, living antler of a member of the Cervidae family (Deer, Elk, Moose etc.), so-called "velveting," to be performed by, or under the direct supervision of a veterinarian. This is to ensure the use of appropriate physical and chemical restraint and anaesthesia.

(February 16, 1995 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – Vicious Dogs

OVMA does not advocate legislation naming specific breeds of dogs as being vicious. OVMA encourages and supports responsible genetic selection, rearing and training of dogs to control aggression.

Addressing dangerous and potentially dangerous dogs is a challenge for municipalities. It is often difficult to determine whether a dog may be dangerous until it has bitten or attacked a person or animal. Municipalities should consider adopting legislation aimed at reducing the likelihood of harmful situations occurring.

It is important for municipalities to keep in mind that dangerous dogs are generally the result of irresponsible ownership. Dogs can become a threat if they are not properly socialized and trained, if they are mistreated or if they are deliberately bred and raised or encouraged to attack people or animals.

First, it must be established exactly what constitutes a dangerous dog. The criteria should not be breed specific as this only discriminates against certain breeds, instead of evaluating individual dogs by their behaviour. Suggested criteria for identifying dangerous dogs include:

- a dog that has killed a person or domestic animal, regardless of the circumstances;
- a dog that has bitten or injured a person or domestic animal. Exceptions may be made if the dog was teased, abused, assaulted or if the dog was reacting to a person trespassing on the property owned by the dog's owner;
- a dog that has shown the disposition or tendency to be threatening or aggressive; or
- an attack trained dog (other than dogs used in law enforcement).

Municipalities should require that dangerous dogs either be euthanized in the interests of public safety, or that their owners meet specific requirements for the humane care of such dogs, that will ensure public safety. Penalties should be established for owners who do not comply with the requirements.

Dangerous dogs should be licensed and spayed or neutered as this may reduce aggressive tendencies and will prevent the owners from profiting from the sale of offspring that are also likely to be dangerous. These dogs should be muzzled and leashed when off the owner's property and strictly confined when on the owner's property. If an owner is unwilling or unable to meet these requirements, euthanasia should be imposed.

(i) Licensing

Municipalities may wish to implement a dangerous dog licence that the owner of such a dog must purchase for a significantly higher fee than a regular dog licence. Such a licence would also have rigid requirements for housing and care of the dog as stated in this section.

(ii) Confinement

Dangerous dogs should be kept indoors or in a secured yard that prevents the dog from escaping over or under the fence or by any other means, and that prevents access by the public. They should not be confined only by a chain or tether.

(iii) Other Requirements

Warning signs should be clearly and visibly posted on the property where a dangerous dog is kept. Municipalities may also require that owners of dangerous dogs carry additional liability insurance that would cover any damage or harm caused by the dog.

(iv) Violations

Dog owners whose animals violate the requirements of the dangerous dog bylaw should receive harsh fines due to the threat of public safety. Fines should be increased for repeat offences. Euthanasia may be imposed, based on the severity and frequency of the infractions.

(v) Dog Fighting

Under no circumstances can dog fighting or the training or keeping of dogs for fighting be permitted. This is an inhumane and illegal activity.

Background:

There has been increasing pressure to make legislation against specific breeds of dogs, most notably the pit-bull terrier, as they have been implicated in serious attacks on humans and other animals. CVMA recognizes that aggressiveness in all dogs, and the subsequent dangers to the public are largely a product of inappropriate methods of genetic selection, rearing and training. All dogs which are selectively bred, reared or trained for aggressiveness, can pose a significant danger.

(February 5, 2014 Board)



OVMA Position Statement – Non-Domesticated Wild Caught Animals as Pets

OVMA is opposed to the capture of wild animals to be kept or sold as pets.

Background:

Many wild-caught exotic pets may endure unnecessary suffering and death during capture, transportation, merchandising and husbandry. This further depletes these species, many of which are considered at risk of being endangered or becoming extinct.

Information on the optimum care and feeding of many wild animals is not readily available; therefore, the keeping of these animals as pets often results in unnecessary suffering and premature death. For these reasons, along with possible public health concerns with some exotic pets*, OVMA cannot condone the trade in captured wild animals as pets.

*Any vertebrate, excluding fish, that normally lives in a wild or natural state and has not been subject to domestication through selective or controlled breeding.

(December 11, 1991 Board)