Access to Veterinary Care: A Critical Animal Welfare Issue

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Preserving the Bond: Access to Veterinary Care

SAWA Annual Conference
Gary Weitzman, DVM, MPH, CAWA
November 14, 2017
The Bond is Real
Psychologists at Miami University have found that people who own pets are:

- More conscientious
- More social

Plus, they have:

- Better self-esteem
- Healthier relationship styles
What Happens When the Bond is Broken?
Shelters Have a Unique Front Row Seat to the Bond Between Humans and Animals
How Do We Intervene Here?
How can we help you keep your pet?

If you feel you have no options, we may be able to help.

**ALTERNATIVES & RESOURCES**

Many pet-related problems are solvable! Talk to us. Whether it’s a behavior problem, a housing issue, or another situation, we’re here to help.

- Behavior Issues
- Medical Care
- Supplies & Food
- Renting & Housing Options
- Military Issues
- Temporary Pet Housing
- Too Many Pets
- Spay & Neuter Needs

San Diego Humane Society
The Bond That Never Developed: Adoption and Relinquishment of Dogs in a Rescue Shelter

Francesca Mundelli and Fenancio Pinto Provide

Department of Psychology, University of Milan

Maria Verga

Institute of Economics, University of Milan

Diana Levi and Sonia Magnifico

Local Animal Advocacy

Milan, Italy

Paola Valacchi

Department of Psychology and Neuroscience, University of Parma

This study carried out a survey and an interview to analyze adoption and relinquishment behaviors of pet owners. The study focused on the reasons why dogs were adopted and was more likely to be conducted among dog owners who had already adopted a dog. The study aimed to understand the reasons why people relinquish their dogs and to identify the factors that influence the decision to relinquish a dog. The study found that the most common reasons for relinquishing a dog were behavioral problems, such as aggression, destructive behaviors, and excessive barking. The study also found that the age of the dog was a significant factor in the decision to relinquish a dog. Additionally, the study found that the decision to relinquish a dog was influenced by the owner's socioeconomic status and the availability of resources to care for the dog.
Number 1 Reason for Relinquishments?
Zero Days Since the last time we ate the drywall in the kitchen.
The Cost of Pet Maintenance

National Council on Pet Population and Policy
Not just for these populations
It used to be just about S/N
80% of pets living in poverty are unsterilized
So... Where Do Shelters Fit In?
Our Biggest Challenge: Access to Veterinary Care
For Those Without Resources...
And Those With...
Private Veterinary Practice is Cost Prohibitive for Many
Pet Insurance hasn’t come to the rescue
Is Small Animal Veterinary Practice a 20th Century Invention?
Shelters Have Taken Up This Challenge
Todays Shelter Veterinary Services

- Shelter Medicine
- Medical Teaching Programs
- Wellness Services
- Vaccination/Microchip Clinics
- Spay/Neuter Clinics
- TNR Clinics
- Mobile Services
- Medical Hot Lines
- Full Service Hospitals
- Specialty/Referral Hospitals
- Euthanasia Services
Spay/Neuter Services
Safety Net Programming
Community Vaccine and S/N Clinics
We all have the same goals...
Stop Relinquishments Due to Lack of Access to Veterinary Care
So Where Do We Go from Here?
Bridging the Divide

Discussions Began Feb 2013
SAWA and AVMA Discussions

February 2013    Las Vegas
September 2013   Atlanta
November 2013    Tempe
February 2014    Las Vegas
February 2015    Las Vegas
March 2015       New Orleans
July 2015        Boston AVMA Convention
November 2015    St. Petersburg
Mutual SAWA and AVMA Goals

Work together on animal welfare issues

Achieve a mutually beneficial relationship with respectful dialogue

Communicate with AVMA and SAWA members to solve client and animal issues on a national level

Save lives and keep clients by working together
SAWA Veterinary Action Committee

SAWA-AVMA Task Force
Education opportunities
Work with AAVMC – Vet schools
Work with AVMA – Private practitioners
Join with those who have already “bridged the gap:”
Bayer, B-I, Purina, VCA, Hills, etc.
But We Don’t Want To Do This Alone...
The Lifesaving Importance of Affordable and Accessible Veterinary Care

Matt Bershadker
President and CEO, ASPCA
The Lifesaving Importance of Affordable and Accessible Veterinary Care

1. Challenges Facing Low Income Pet Owners

2. The ASPCA Approach

3. Engaging Communities in Need: NYC, LA, and Miami

4. Next Steps in Keeping People & Pets Together
Challenges Facing Low Income Pet Owners

1. Lack of affordable pet friendly housing

2. High shelter fees that prevent return to owner

3. Lack of co-housing for homeless pet owners and their pets

4. Inability to afford or access veterinary care and spay/neuter
   - In LA, 77% of owners relinquishing pets named lack of access to vet care as the primary reason
Challenges Facing Low Income Pet Owners
ASPCA Pet Re-Homing Research

Key Findings:

1. More than 1 million pet owners re-home their pets every year
2. 40% would have kept pet with access to free or low-cost vet care
3. Low-income owners most impacted
Challenges Facing Low Income Pet Owners
*Less income doesn’t mean less love*

While laws have evolved to where failure to meet needs can constitute cruelty…

1. Poverty can keep pet owners from being able to provide their animals with adequate vet care

2. Attachment to pets may be greater among the homeless

3. There’s no correlation between income and desire/commitment to provide necessary care
Challenges Facing Low Income Pet Owners

NYC: Intake and Poverty
Challenges Facing Low Income Pet Owners

LA: Intake and Poverty

[Map of Los Angeles showing pet intake density and people in poverty by census tract]
Challenges Facing Low Income Pet Owners:

*Miami: Intake and Poverty*
The ASPCA Approach – Keeping Pet Owners and their Pets Together

1. Community Medicine
   - Spay/Neuter
   - Primary Pet Care – Mobile and Stationary

2. ASPCA Hospital (urgent care)

3. Community Engagement Teams

4. Humane Alliance

5. Partnering with local veterinarians/Grants

6. Making public policy more compassionate, effective
Community Medicine

*High Quality, High Volume Spay/Neuter and Primary Pet Care*

1. Spay/Neuter
   - 85,000 surgeries

2. Primary Pet Care
   - 15,000 services
     - Exam
     - Diagnostics & treatments, non-invasive
     - Treatment for parasites, ear & eye infections, skin conditions
     - Vaccinations
     - Short term pain management
     - Humane euthanasia
     - Basic education
ASPCA Animal Hospital & Community Engagement Teams

1. ASPCA Animal Hospital
   • 15,000 clients
   • Cruelty cases and low/no income only
   • ARC -- Animal Recovery Center

2. Community Engagement Teams
   • Shelter and in-field retention efforts
Humane Alliance
*Training and influencing America’s veterinarians*

1. Increases access to - and delivers - low cost, high-quality, high-volume spay/neuter

2. Creates, maintains, & leverages networks of professionals

3. 153 clinics mentored nationwide

4. 1.25M surgeries per year

5. 500 students trained per year = 14.5%

6. 300 veterinarians trained per year

7. 200 other, veterinary assistants, office managers
## Partnerships with Local Veterinarians

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2014 - 2017</th>
<th>Total # of Vet Partners</th>
<th>Total # of Animals Helped</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NYC</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3,697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8,570</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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$3,100,000 in grants
Changing Public Policy

• Supporting state “animal population control funds”
  – funding for S/N for low income pet owners

• Waiving fees that keep low income pet owners from reclaiming pets

• Ending and preventing mandatory spay/neuter laws
  (for non shelter animals)

• Ensuring access to low-cost spay/neuter services
Changing Public Policy

The Effects of Mandatory Spay/Neuter Laws

Lack of affordable option
Fines for lack of compliance
Inability to pay
Relinquishment
Changing Public Policy
Case Study: Alabama Veterinary Board

• Alabama VMA was able to prevent legislative efforts to open access to spay/neuter resources

• Alabama State Vet Board was actively interfering with the operation of low cost spay/neuter clinic

• In 2017, ASPCA prepared a federal lawsuit against the Board

• Our lawsuit threat persuaded the Board and enabled S/N access
Engaging Communities: New York City

- Manhattan
- Queens
- Brooklyn
- Staten Island
- Bronx
Engaging Communities: Los Angeles

- Baldwin
- Downtown LA
- Downey
Engaging Communities: Miami

ASPCA Veterinary Clinic at Liberty City Floor Plan
Next Steps in Keeping Pets & People Together

1. Support/engage communities in safety net work

2. Provide community medicine/clinics/primary pet care for owners with limited resources

3. Fight for laws and policies that increase access to affordable vet care

4. Encourage private vet practitioners to get involved
Achieving Health Equity for All Pets

Michael J. Blackwell, DVM, MPH
Director
Program for Pet Health Equity
College of Social Work
University of Tennessee
Key Points

- Pets as Family
- Major Animal Welfare Crisis Affecting Pets
- Making Choices
- Aligned Veterinary Care
“Family”

- The Harris Poll® #41, July 16, 2015*
  - 95% of pet owners consider their pets to be members of the family
  - 45% of pet owners say they’ve frequently or occasionally bought birthday presents for their pets
  - 31% say they frequently or occasionally cook especially for their pets
  - Today’s “family” is often a social unit consisting of humans and non-humans

*More Than Ever, Pets are Members of the Family (http://www.theharrispoll.com/health-and-life/Pets-are-Members-of-the-Family.html)
Societal Behaviors Toward Pets

- $69.36 billion (projected) 2017 expenditures (American Pet Products Association)
  - Estimated Breakdown:
    - Food $29.69 billion
    - Supplies/OTC Medicine $14.93 billion
    - Vet Care $16.62 billion
    - Live animal purchases $2.01 billion
    - Other Services $6.11 billion

- Evolving animal welfare laws
  - Custody cases
  - Trusts and estates
  - Restraining orders
25 Million dogs and cats

- **20,914,766** Households participating in SNAP (Oct. 2017)
- **0.669** Avg. number of households with a dog or cat (AVMA)
- **13,991,979** SNAP households with a dog or cat
- **1.85** Avg. number of dogs or cats per household (AVMA)
- **25,885,160** SNAP Households with dogs and cats
25 Million dogs and cats

What this number does not include:

- Pets other than dogs or cats
- Pets in middle class households with limited discretionary funds

Assumptions:

- Few or no preventive or sick care options available
- Left to endure pain and suffering or pre-mature death
- Relinquished to the animal sheltering system
  - 30-40% just need temporary help (Dr. Sara Pizano)
USDA expenditures for food and nutrition assistance, fiscal 1980-2016

Disenfranchisement

- American story of the high costs of health care
- Struggling families unable to provide for veterinary care
- Needs to be understood to find evidence-based solutions
- Alignment of resources can establish a safety-net
Should only the well-off have pets?

- Yes
  - Deny “companionship with pets” to those who are less fortunate

- No
  - Choice 1: Continue to ignore families in need
  - Choice 2: Establish a safety-net for the non-human members of the family
Program for Pet Health Equity

Mission
To align resources to provide care for pets not adequately served by the current system.

Vision
All pets have access to veterinary care, including those in low-income households.

Objectives
Foster, promote, and facilitate national collaboration and public policy development to remove barriers to veterinary care for all pets, through education, service, and social and public health research, in collaboration with strategic partners.
Achieving Health Equity for All Pets: Aligned Veterinary Care System

- **Coverage**
  - Better insurance programs
  - Better third-party support

- **Services**
  - Eliminate “care deserts”
  - “Effective” vs “Gold standard” care

- **Timeliness**
  - Efficient in-take
  - Pre-qualification?

- **Workforce**
  - Interprofessional (One Health) - Social services and public health
  - Incentivizing veterinarians
  - Mid-level veterinary care providers?
Access to Veterinary Care: Barriers, Best Practices, and Public Policy
(National study funded by Maddie’s Fund)

**Pet Owners**
- Poverty (<138% of FPL)
- Struggling (138 to 250% of FPL)
- Middle-class and up (>250% of FPL)

**Veterinary Service Providers**
- Private for-profit
- Nonprofit
- Animal control agencies

Commissioned by the Access to Veterinary Care Coalition (http://avcc.utk.edu)
Short-Term Outcomes

• National Population Study
  • Identify primary barriers
  • Characterize what’s working
  • Provide a basis for public policies

• Seminal Report (By December 2018)

• Program for Pet Health Equity
Intermediate-Term Outcomes

- **Education**
  - Scholarly reports and symposia
  - Fellowship in Leadership and Public Policy

- **Service**
  - Collaboration with community-based projects
  - National Registry of aligned veterinary care providers

- **Social and Public Health Research**
  - Impacts on families and veterinary care providers
  - Public health risks and threats
Long-Term Outcomes

- Better coordination of resources
  - Veterinary medicine and sheltering system
  - Social services and Public health

- Veterinary care system that serves “all” families
  - New models for reaching underserved families
  - Public policies that form a safety-net

- Pet health equity
  - All pets have an opportunity to receive veterinary care

Leading Pet Health Indicators
- High priority pet health issues and actions
Key Stakeholders

1. Pets and their people
2. Veterinary, social services, and public health professionals
3. Animal shelters, rescues, and other animal welfare organizations
4. Federal, state, and local government
5. Corporations, foundations, and other support organizations
6. Private citizens
Achieving Pet Health Equity

Aligned Veterinary Care System
• Coverage
• Services
• Timeliness
• Workforce

Center for Pet Health Equity
• Education
• Service
• Social & Public Health Research

Access to Veterinary Care Report
• Barriers
• Best Practices
• Public Policy
Thank You!

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