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Workshop on Animal Abuse and Neglect

It has been recognized that a connection exists between animal abuse and family violence. Not only are the household animals abused but often also spouses and children. This puts the veterinarian in a very difficult position. VHUP's Ethics Committee has developed a policy covering clinicians' responsibilities when animal abuse is suspected. To discuss this policy and its implications in depth, a Discussion Workshop on Animal Neglect and Abuse was held on September 16 at VHUP.

The event was organized by Dr. James Serpell, Marie A. Moore Professor of Humane Ethics and Animal Welfare, and chaired jointly by Dr. Serpell, Dr. James Wilson, adjunct associate professor of practice management, and Dr. Tom Van Winkle, associate professor of pathology. Members of the humane community participated as did students and faculty. Phil Arkow of the Animal Welfare Association and author of the Latham Foundation's publication *Breaking the Cycle of Violence* presented the Grand Rounds lecture with the topic "Domestic Violence, Animal Abuse, and the Veterinarian."

During the workshops that followed, VHUP's policy statement on animal abuse/neglect was discussed and feedback requested with an emphasis on diagnostic criteria for recognizing abuse. Also discussed was the need for the collection of data on animal abuse/neglect cases, and the concept of a veterinary forensic residency program here. Another session addressed legal and other liability issues for veterinarians reporting suspected cases of animal abuse/neglect.

The second part of the discussions covered parallels with child abuse and domestic violence; current local veterinary involvement in the reporting of suspected animal abuse/neglect; and fighting dogs.


VHUP, being located in an urban area, has a heavy case load, particularly in the Emergency Service. It is here that many of the suspected abuse/neglect cases are seen. The determination of suspected animal abuse/neglect is often an educated guess. The account of how the injuries occurred differs from the signs

present. Sometimes family members indicate that they are frightened of another family member and insist on a particular scenario out of fear. Clinicians had long been unsure how to handle these cases. The policy outlines a protocol that establishes them as medical investigators whose role it is to represent the animals' and the families' interests and request that appropriate agencies with knowledge of animal abuse and/or child abuse review the facts and evaluate the environment into which their patients will be discharged after medical care has been provided.

A chain of reporting has been established and a list of animal agencies that need to be contacted is on hand. VHUP's personnel have no legal jurisdiction to intervene on behalf of an animal, that is the responsibility of the SPCA's officers who have police power to investigate reports of alleged animal abuse and who take custody of such animals. The policy includes a list of signs of suggestive abuse and/or neglect and covers reporting the suspected abuse/neglect to the SPCA and how to handle the clients. VHUP will protect the clinicians from legal actions in these cases.

The issue of fighting dogs is not covered in the policy and is handled differently. In the event that abuse of persons is suspected, the hospital's social worker is informed.

The workshop was enthusiastically received and brought the shelter community into closer contact and discussions, not only with faculty, but also with students. Those wishing further details on the workshop or the hospital policy on abused/neglected animals can contact Dr. James Serpell at the School.

A few weeks after the workshop, Drs. Serpell, Wilson and Van Winkle led a panel discussion on animal abuse and domestic violence at the American Humane Association's annual Shelter Veterinarian's Conference in Philadelphia. 

Benefit Events

The Brandywine Carriage Driving Club held its annual Brandywine Carriage Driving Show in June. For the third consecutive year, the club donated the proceeds of the event to the New Bolton Center Field Service. The 1998 show will be held on June 7.

The International Sporthorse Registry and the Oldenburg North America Mare, Foal and Stallion Inspection were held September 4 and 5 at Hilltop Farms, Inc. in Colora. MD. Proceeds from the event were donated to New Bolton Center for the planned new Imaging Building.



"George" Constantine Pournaras receives a plaque marking his more than 40 years of service to the School from Dr. Lawrence Soma with Dr. Charles Raker looking on. A ceremony was held in October at New Bolton Center to mark Mr. Pournaras' retirement, though he won't be totally absent as he will continue to work part-time as an anesthesia technician.