

Letter to the Editor

Believes puppy mills should be eradicated

As the Apr 26, 2000 NBC "Dateline" program and the February 1999 issue of *Reader's Digest* pointed out, "There is no ready source of puppies for the pet store industry other than puppy mills." For over 15 years I have known this fact and have counseled my clients to avoid pet stores when shopping for a puppy. Likewise, when I have a client with a new puppy present me with a pet shop warranty, I explain to them that their newest family member has a shady origin, very likely a puppy mill.

Not all clients are happy with this news, especially those who feel they have been swindled. For this reason, most veterinarians do not discuss the puppy mill-pet store connection. Some veterinarians want their clients to have a "happy-happy" visit and not leave their clinic with anything but good feelings. For the same reason, some veterinarians won't mention that a client's pet is overweight.

As the most authoritative source of pet-related information available to the public, the veterinary profession should be championing the fight to eradicate puppy mills. It does not. Some veterinarians may feel that stopping pet store sales of puppies would hurt their practice income. Those same vet-

erinarians probably do not push spaying and neutering for the same reason. They are wrong.

No state in this nation has a shortage of dogs. Millions are euthanized every year, because there are too many of them. Puppy mills and pet stores are primarily to blame for this tragedy. And so are we. When someone buys a puppy in a pet store, they are perpetuating the cycle of misery and suffering for the dam of that puppy and all those to follow. They have paid a tremendously inflated price and believe they have a high-quality puppy with a pedigree and "papers" from AKC. In addition, many believe they can recoup their purchase cost by breeding their registered dog and selling the puppies. Our part in this problem is that most veterinarians do not discourage breeding of those dogs or educate the client about the first two points. Failure to do so promotes the problem by default.

In my opinion, the AVMA will not take constructive steps toward

eliminating puppy mills. Instead, it formulated a politically correct, carefully worded position statement (AVMA Policy Statement on commercial pet production and dealers covered by the Animal Welfare Act, and pet shops).¹

It is up to every conscientious caring veterinarian in this country to do something themselves every day in their practices. If you are an employed veterinarian and the boss only wants "happy-happy," then it's time for you to start your own practice. The public will soon forget about "Dateline" and *Reader's Digest*. Most probably did not see or read it. The pet store industry knows this. All they have to do is keep quiet. This will all blow over and everything will remain status quo.

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1. AVMA. Companion Animals, Horses, and Wildlife. In: 2000 AVMA Membership Directory and Resource Manual. Schaumburg, Ill: AVMA, 2000;71.

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