

Letters to the Editor

Thoughts on study of attitudes toward free-roaming cats

The article titled, “Attitudes toward and perceptions of free-roaming cats among individuals living in Ohio”¹ is extremely interesting (even for nonstatisticians) and revealing. Dr. Lord should be commended. It really gets to the heart of the problem, that is, people’s attitudes and perceptions. Management of free-roaming cats cannot and will not really progress as long as many people have unrealistic perceptions and uncaring attitudes.

It is unfortunate that, of Ohio cat owners, only 60% supported mandatory spay-neuter programs, only 32% agreed cats should be kept indoors (despite the fact that 80% agreed free-roaming cats typically have shorter lives), and only 36% agreed local governments should control free-roaming cats. So even those who own cats have serious ambivalence about controlling and protecting them, and many other people still see cats as semidisposable.

In my opinion, a statement that was missing from Dr. Lord’s survey that would have made it more complete and useful is “Free-roaming cats yearly kill tens to hundreds of millions of wild birds, small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and fish,” followed by her six responses. Without this statement or one like it, the respondents’ attitudes and concerns about the conservation impact of free-roaming cats were not queried, and it isn’t possible to know whether the 76% of all respondents who support trap-neuter-return (TNR) programs do so despite wildlife impacts.

In her discussion, Dr. Lord cites a “great need for collaboration... to provide spay-neuter programs...” It would seem most people, including wildlife conservationists, would strongly agree as long as this doesn’t mean large-scale TNR programs, particularly anywhere near parks and other

wildlife areas. Dr. Lord further states, “Without these solutions, the number of free-roaming cats in Ohio will undoubtedly continue to rise.” Unless these solutions are almost universally embraced, the number of free-roaming cats will increase. As one of Dr. Lord’s cited references² has shown, reliance on TNR, even well-funded and widely supported TNR, will not substantially reduce or eliminate free-roaming cat populations over large areas or long periods. We can’t spay our way out of this. Only realistic attitudes and perceptions that deal with the root of the problem and all the consequences of proposed solutions hold the likelihood of long-term success.

David A. Jessup, DVM, MPVM, DACZM
Santa Cruz, Calif

1. Lord LK. Attitudes toward and perceptions of free-roaming cats among individuals living in Ohio. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2008;232:1159–1167.
2. Foley P, Foley JE, Levy JK, et al. Analysis of the impact of trap-neuter-return programs on populations of feral cats. *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2005;227:1775–1781.

The author responds:

I thank Dr. Jessup for his feedback on my article. He raises an important point on the issue of the impact of free-roaming cats on wildlife.

Dr. Jessup suggests that a statement on the numbers of wildlife killed by free-roaming cats should

have preceded my questions on regulations of free-roaming cats and participant support for spay-neuter programs. First, to my knowledge, there is no scientific study that validates Dr. Jessup’s numbers and, specifically, we have no scientific data on the number of wildlife killed by free-roaming cats in Ohio, the focus of my study. Second, even if such data existed, to include a statement such that Dr. Jessup has suggested would have potentially biased the participants and adversely affected the results of my survey. The goal of the study was to determine Ohioans’ attitudes toward and perceptions of free-roaming cats without any attempt to bias them in their thoughts one way or another.

I agree with Dr. Jessup that trap-neuter-return programs near wildlife areas should not be supported. I also agree that spay-neuter alone will not solve the problem of free-roaming cats. Clearly, we need a more comprehensive community approach, and the needs of communities will vary. On the basis of the survey results, there is support among Ohioans that spay-neuter is a part of this solution, and hopefully, the findings will help stimulate discussions in communities on how to address this growing welfare problem.

Linda K. Lord, DVM, PhD
Veterinary Preventive Medicine
College of Veterinary Medicine
The Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio

Instructions for Writing a Letter to the Editor

Readers are invited to submit letters to the editor. Letters may not exceed 500 words and 6 references. Not all letters are published; all letters accepted for publication are subject to editing. Those pertaining to anything published in the *JAVMA* should be received within one month of the date of publication. Submission via e-mail (JournalLetters@avma.org) or fax (847-925-9329) is encouraged; authors should give their full contact information, including address, daytime telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address.

Letters containing defamatory, libelous, or malicious statements will not be published, nor will letters representing attacks on or attempts to demean veterinary societies or their committees or agencies. Viewpoints expressed in published letters are those of the letter writers and do not necessarily represent the opinions or policies of the AVMA.

Additional information on dental chew treats

I read with interest and dismay the article titled, "Esophageal foreign body obstruction caused by a dental chew treat in 31 dogs (2000–2006)"¹ by Drs. Leib and Sartor. For background and disclosure, I became interested in Greenies (the dental chew that was the focus of the study) four years ago as a plaque-control product and I presently consult on a limited basis for the company that manufactures the product.

My dismay came from what I fear the veterinary community will take away from reading the article, that is, that Greenies are presently unsafe. Once the Mars Company, which owns the Greenies brand, recognized a potential problem with their product, they removed all the "old" product from store shelves and reformulated the product to ensure it was soluble and still maintained efficacy for oral health. The reformulated Greenies have been awarded the Veterinary Oral Health Council seal of acceptance. Part of the Veterinary Oral Health Council acceptance process is the consideration of patient product safety.

I appreciate the authors' efforts in amassing the cases and bringing to the forefront that dental products can cause health issues. Unfortunately, the article largely reflects past history regarding the Greenie product and has no relevance to the present.

The bigger problem with this article is that the reader may be afraid to recommend dental chews that help remove plaque, which will be bad for the patient in the end. Hopefully, this letter will help set the record straight.

*Jan Bellows, DVM, DAVDC, DABVP
All Pets Dental
Weston, Fla*

1. Leib MS, Sartor LL. Esophageal foreign body obstruction caused by a dental chew treat in 31 dogs (2000–2006). *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2008;232:1021–1025.

We thank JAVMA for the opportunity to comment on Drs. Leib and Sartor's article regarding esophageal foreign body obstruction caused by a dental chew treat.¹ The statement that "On the basis of the results of this study, the authors recommend that the original dental chew treat not be given to dogs that weigh < 8

kg and be given cautiously to larger dogs" may cause readers to infer that the original formulation of Greenies dental chew continues to be available to the public. In actuality, the original formula has not been manufactured or distributed since September 2006. At that time, we introduced a new formulation of the canine dental chew with highly soluble proteins and differing chewy textures for each of five weight ranges.

We are grateful to Drs. Leib and Sartor for bringing this issue to the attention of the veterinary community. We also appreciate the invaluable advice and counsel of Dr. Leib and other specialists in the fields of veterinary gastroenterology, dentistry, and nutrition as we reformulated the dental chews.

We have conducted internal studies and engaged Dr. George Fahey of the University of Illinois to conduct a solubility and digestibility study using well-known, accepted protocols.² Results reveal that the reformulated and current Greenies canine dental chew is highly soluble, digestible, and easy to chew.³

*Bradley Quest, DVM
Staff Veterinarian
S&M NuTec, LLC The Greenies Co
North Kansas City, Mo*

1. Leib MS, Sartor LL. Esophageal foreign body obstruction caused by a dental chew treat in 31 dogs (2000–2006). *J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2008;232:1021–1025.
2. University of Illinois study confirms high solubility of Greenies dental chews. The technical article page. Available at: www.greenies.com/en_US/vets/technical_articles.aspx. Accessed Sep 1, 2007.
3. S&M NuTec LLC. Studies confirm that reformulated Greenies canine dental chews are more soluble, digestible and easier to chew. *Clinician's Brief* 2008;6:5.

Veterinarian speaks out against practices in horse racing

I am a small animal practitioner, but horses have been my passion during my entire life. What I saw watching the Kentucky Derby just made my heart bleed. To see that gorgeous filly collapse at the end of the race and immediately be euthanized was just more than I could take. I know I am not the only person and I hope

I am not the only veterinarian who feels that racing in its traditional form is just cruel. I believe these young horses are suffering and are abused, all for money, fame, and glory. Shame on us for participating, condoning, or just sitting back doing nothing when so many of us know it is wrong. How many of these adolescent horses have long racing careers? Most are broken down by the time they are four or five years old, if not sooner. The lucky ones have injuries that will at least allow them to have some kind of worthwhile life as pleasure or show horses or just pets.

I just can't sit back and not speak out about this any longer. We, as veterinarians, know that if the training could be postponed a year (or better, two), the number of injuries may be reduced enormously. We also know that racing is all about money and to postpone starting them until they are four- or five-year-olds would cost much more money. It is simply amazing to me that racing people are too ignorant to realize that if they invested a little more time and money, they'd have horses that could perform better and longer, yielding more in the long run. Do hunter/jumper trainers start their horses jumping over fences at two years of age or even three? Of course not. And most jumpers continue to perform at even the highest levels well into their teens. It is long overdue that the veterinary community voices its opinion about the horrible abuses that go on in the racing industry. I know that I, for one, will never watch another horse race. After Barbaro, Eight Belles, and the countless others whose names I don't know, I simply can't take any more.

*Karl R. Hartsock, VMD
Browns Mills Animal Clinic
Browns Mills, NJ*

More insight on insurance and the veterinary profession

Recent expressed concerns regarding the potential threat of pet health insurance to the veterinary profession clearly illustrate a serious problem. Veterinarians have a very poor understanding of indemnity and managed care insurance dynamics. Contrary to belief, managed care companies cannot demand that veterinarians participate in their

provider networks. Participation requires a contractual agreement. Managed care companies may ask us to participate, and they may even attempt to scare us into participating. But if every veterinarian says no, we will never be subjected to the problems associated with managed care. With no network of managed care providers, managed care cannot exist. What pet owner will purchase a managed care policy if there are no veterinarians contracted to provide controlled services?

Who among us will be the first to sign a provider network contract? Who among us will willingly limit our fees and lose control over our treatment protocols? Will any of us sign because we fear that we will lose our clients to network veterinarians? How many of us will want to transfer medical cost risk from the managed care company to ourselves? Who wants to maintain a dual fee schedule—one for insured and the other for uninsured owners? Who wants to see our personal

incomes reduced, our cash flow put on delay, and our workloads increased? Who wants to follow the lead of the medical profession?

Members of the dental profession asked themselves those questions a number of years ago. Instead of running from insurance or agreeing to the demands of managed care, they educated themselves. Organized dental medicine led the way. Dentists learned to reject managed care and to embrace indemnity insurance. They took control over their financial destiny, and they prospered. But they did so from a perspective of being educated and fully informed. Look closely at the US Department of Labor mean income statistics.¹ Compare the personal incomes of veterinarians and the other health professions (physicians, \$155,150; dentists, \$147,010; pharmacists, \$98,960; and veterinarians, \$84,090). And the next time you encounter physicians complaining about insurance, ask them whether they would prefer that their patients

be limited to paying medical fees from discretionary income.

Pet health insurance is an extremely complicated industry with legal and regulatory restrictions that stagger the imagination. But all those regulations are in place to protect the insurance consumer, not the provider. Whether the AVMA someday has a program of its own, partners with an existing entity, or just provides educational opportunities and advice to veterinarians remains to be seen. But one thing is for certain. The more veterinarians know and understand the complicated aspects of insurance, the better we will be able to decide our future regarding it. The fact that the AVMA and the GHLIT are willing to begin that educational process is encouraging, and we should be grateful for their efforts.

*Kent A. Kruse, DVM
San Antonio, Tex*

1. May 2007 national occupational employment and wage estimates. Available at: www.bls.gov/oes/current/oes_nat.htm#b29-0000. Accessed May 20, 2008.