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status quo

ALTERNATIVES IN VETERINARY MEDICAL EDUCATION



ISSUE 24
SEPTEMBER 2003

Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights

Pound Seizure Why Veterinary Medical Students Should Oppose It



Susan Hall, D.V.M

The issue of pound seizure; i.e., using animals sold from shelters for research, testing, or teaching, is not a new one. It continues to be a contentious subject between some veterinary medical school faculty, veterinary medical students, and animal advocates.

From an animal advocacy point of view, as well as from the perspective of most shelters, the practice is unacceptable. When animals are sold from a shelter, public trust in the shelter is eroded. The public becomes reluctant to use a shelter when they believe that the animals' interests aren't being met. Some are less

likely to report or turn in a lost animal. In some cases, there are people who would rather dump an animal on the street than turn the animal into a shelter that will sell the animal for research. And, it really isn't the job of a shelter to sell to outside businesses. A shelter's mission, aside from rabies control, is to hold lost animals until they can be found or to adopt animals who need new homes.

If ever there were a time when someone wanted to purchase the pelts of euthanized animals from a shelter, you can bet the public would strongly react. Further, if someone wanted to sell live animals so their body parts could be harvested, people would be very upset. I see no difference when animals are sold alive from a shelter for other purposes, regardless of the benefits that may occur as a result.

Another reason to oppose pound seizure is that shelters make mistakes with record keeping. Because mistakes are common, someone's lost companion animal could mistakenly be sold. This is one reason why the practice is banned in thirteen states. In

states where pound seizure is allowed, the animals must be held the required, legal holding period. But, in some states, some of these animals may not have even had a chance at adoption. In some cases, 'owner-relinquished' animals immediately



became the property of the shelter and are not required to be placed for adoption. These are the very animals who trust people but are going to universities for teaching and research.

I often hear the argument that, "They're going to die, anyway. Why not make use

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Pound Seizure

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of their lives? It is true that most of the animals who end up in shelters will die there. However, the most humane thing we can do as a society if the animal is going to be euthanized anyway is to ensure that the death is quick and humane. Putting a stressed, distressed, depressed, and scared animal on a truck and shipping that animal to another facility where he or she will be impounded for weeks to months and then be handled by strangers is not humane. Many universities claim the animals are used and killed soon after arrival; however, federal law requires that the animals be kept for five days at the university before being used in case someone is searching for a lost animal. Keep in mind that these animals are former companion animals; most are used to being in a home.

An animal doesn't have to be used for some purpose to make its life meaningful or valuable. They are all valuable just because they are who they are. As for the veterinary profession, it certainly doesn't speak well of veterinarians who deem the use of unwanted animals as necessary and acceptable for veterinary training. Instead of taking advantage of the overpopulation problem, the veterinary profession should be doing more to prevent it. Further, what will teachers and researchers do when the humane community finally resolves the overpopulation problem?

Another argument I've heard for using animals from shelters is that they didn't pass a temperament test; therefore, they couldn't be adopted. Many animals who end up in a shelter and are temperament tested are scared and are not aggressive. Some testers will fail a dog who chases a cat. Some others are prejudice against certain breeds. There is no uniformity in temperament testing and, therefore, in the claims that animals sold failed a temperament test. Further, researchers and teachers are not going to jeopardize their assistants or students with animals who will bite them. Most of the animals sold are friendly because they were former 'pets.'

Veterinary schools should strive to use sources of animals that do not include harming or killing. Surgery training can be accomplished by using animals who benefit from the surgery (e.g., spays and neuters). And, cadavers can be obtained through client donation programs. Using animals from shelters is unnecessary and should be opposed by all veterinary medical students.

Editor's note: Dr. Susan Hall is an AVAR Board Member who currently is in private practice. She worked at the Michigan Humane Society for five years and has worked with numerous animal rescuers. If you are interested in stopping pound seizure at your school, please contact the AVAR office for assistance.

Veterinary Students Making A Difference

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Changes like these, however, do not happen overnight. The political and economic barriers to effecting such decisions are understandably enormous. Changes like those that I propose require energy, co-operation and foresight, not to mention capital. When faced with these realities, it becomes easy to see why the status quo remains. After all, veterinary colleges have been doing things this way for years and have never had a problem. The classes, for the majority, seem well satisfied and any dissenters can be quieted using minimal tactics.

What the classes don't fully realize, however, is that there is power in numbers. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the united class as a whole, to decide the course of their education and in turn the course of their lives. In this way, we can project ourselves as sensitive, caring veterinarians to our clients and to the general public. We have the opportunity as progressive, strong thinkers to raise the level of the profession to a new level — one that encompasses sincerity, compassion, and moral dignity.

Accent of an Alternative

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Considering this, my lab partners and I made slides of the liver and were able to view the histological changes. In addition, most donors have written a personal letter to the veterinary students, often describing the animal's personality, sharing the important role that he or she played in their family, and the comfort that they receive in the knowledge that their beloved pet's body will be used to benefit the next generation of veterinarians. These personal accounts reinforce student compassion and respect for the cadavers.

Embalming generally follows the process as described by Dr. Kumar from Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine (Kumar et al. 2001 JME 28(2): 73-77). This process does not involve injecting colored latex into the arteries and veins. Although this made the vessels more difficult to distinguish, I did not feel at a disadvantage. In fact, we had to visualize and really think more about the location in order to find the artery or vein — simulating a real-life experience where arteries and veins are not color-coded. This is a similar experience reported by Tufts University's veterinary students. In addition, when it came time for the exam and injected animals were used, the vessels were that much easier to identify.

I felt I benefited from my experience with the body donation program in the small animal anatomy course. It is exciting to see this program develop and be a part of it.

Editor's note: To learn even more about willed body donation programs, go to the description of Educational Memorial Programs (listed under "Resources") on the AVAR's web site at <http://avar.org>