How to maximize canine welfare in veterinary practices and in homes

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Introduction

What is animal welfare?

Animal welfare is preserved if the animals have the freedom to react appropriately and adequately to:

1. Hunger, thirst or incorrect food;
2. Thermal and physical discomfort;
3. Injuries or diseases;
4. Fear and chronic stress, and thus,
5. The freedom to display normal behavioural patterns that allow the animal to adapt to the demands of changing environmental circumstances.

(Ohl & van der Staay 2011)
1. “... hunger, thirst or incorrect food”

- Cruelty/neglect
- Ample food and water
- “incorrect food”?  
  - All meat diets
- Incorrect provision of it  
  - Obesity is a classic example of “cruelty with kindness” (Jonckheer-Sheehy 2010)  
  - Diabetes, joint disease, ...
- Role of vet!
2. “... thermal & physical discomfort”

- Dogs are highly adaptive
- Will behaviourally adapt
- Must have adequate resources
  - Space
  - Outdoor access
  - Bedding
  - Shelter (e.g. kennel, raised platform)

(Taylor & Mills 2007)
3. “… injuries or diseases”

- Animals feel pain
- To escape/avoid harmful stimuli
- If in pain or sick → sickness behaviour → resting → recovery
- Analgesia/medicine (vets) prevents non-functional pain, limits illness, → positive emotional state for animal
- Propagation of hereditary diseases! (Rooney & Sargan 2010)
- Iatrogenic injuries/illnesses! CPD, self regulation of vets, legislation etc.
- Education of dog owners and other stakeholders
- Proactive health (physical and behavioural) assessment

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4. “... fear and chronic stress”

- Escape/avoid fearful stimuli
- Non-adaptive? Welfare compromised
- Fear people, noises, locations, other animals, objects
- Veterinary clinic setting: Most dogs exhibit fear (Döring et al 2009) or stress reactions at the vets (Ortolani et al 2012)
- Vets: Identify young animals at an early age that are very fearful/anxious (Overall 2013); puppies fearful at the vets were also fearful at 18mo (Godbout & Frank 2011)
- Vets should implement a fear and anxiety assessment at each visit! (Overall 2013)
- Vets must avoid/minimise inducing fear/anxiety in their patients (Overall 2013)

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Vets must avoid/minimise inducing fear/anxiety in their patients

The ‘Ladder of Aggression’: how a dog reacts to stress or threat © Kendal Shepherd 2004

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Dr Stephen Brammeier
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Tips to safeguard behavioural health

- Always consider the effect the required diagnostic/treatment/handling will have on the behavior of the patient!
- Patient motivators: food, attention, touch, play/toys, space
- Behaviour notes on record
  - Great dog, sweet, nice
  - Anxious: ok with owner; better without owner
  - Needs muzzle and/or chemical restraint
    - Sedate and reverse?
    - A muzzle is not a license to wrestle with a dog!!
- Waiting room: Car/car park/exam room/waiting room?
- Weigh in: Scale set into floor with surface of scale covered in floor material
- Exam room:
  - Better on table/floor or in car park
  - no spaces to get under, or leash tangles;
  - table
  - dimmable lighting
- Behaviour accessories

(Stephen Brammeier)
Fear and stress at home

- Monotonous predictable routines → stress
- Dogs with diseased behaviour patterns may actually benefit from highly predictable routines.
- Try to reach the optimal balance of variability and routine that is ideal for the individual dog!
- Dogs in the home environment may also live in fear of their owner or of other people, animals or things in their immediate environment → Compromise welfare (health and lifespan) of dogs as evidenced by a myriad of health problems, increased abnormal behaviour and reduced normal behaviour (Morgan & Tromborg 2007).
- Environmental enrichment may facilitate some element of control by giving a choice of where to sit/stand/lie (Taylor and Mills 2007).
- Vets often fail to address the concerns that clients voice about their pet’s behaviour during consultations! (Roshier & McBride 2013)
Behaviour problems!

- Euthanasia, rehoming
- Separation anxiety:
  - Major welfare problem
  - Often mis- or under- diagnosed
  - Owners may think that the dog is deliberately destroying the home environment
  - Veterinarians may underestimate the nature and severity of the problem
- Incorrect application of learning theory
  - By (vets, owners and others)
  - May cause development of behaviour problems
    - Incorrect use of positive punishment techniques (often based on out-dated and flawed wolf pack theory) are still readily used in certain dog training circles.
      - This can have disastrous consequences for dog welfare. (Grohmann et al 2013)
      - Use of aversive techniques are condemned by leading canine experts. (Casey & Bradshaw 2009; Overall 2013; ASVAB 2008)
    - However, on the other hand, incorrect application of positive reinforcement techniques can also cause major problems.
- Education of vets, dog owners and others working with dogs on this subject is of paramount importance
- Veterinarians need to be proactive in educating dog owners, preventing these problems from developing in the first place and treating dogs that do suffer from anxieties or phobias.
- Veterinarians can promote good puppy socialisation programmes

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5. “The freedom to display normal behavioural patterns that allow the animal to adapt to the demands of changing environmental circumstances”

Normal (rewarding) behaviours promote welfare (Taylor & Mills 2007):

- **Exploratory**
  - Increase complexity of environment, Larger kennels, Other forms of environmental enrichment

- **Social contact behaviour**
  - Social dog groups
    - Not necessarily a good thing (confinement, ltd resources, owner misunderstandings etc; Aggression)
  - Human contact

- **Playing**
  - Toys, playing with dog, group housing

- **Exercise**
  - Basic biological requirement! (Taylor & Mills 2007)
  - Group housing, feeding trails
  - Walking, cycling, swimming

- Prevent these behaviours or provide no facilitation for their performance? ➔ Problems!!!! (stereotypic behaviour etc).

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Final word

- Veterinarians and pet owners have a duty to maximise the welfare of the dogs in their care.
  - The Animal Welfare Act was passed in 2006 in the United Kingdom.
  - Revolutionary as those caring for animals have to
    • prevent harm occurring to animals in their care, and
    • Have a legal ‘duty to care’ and can be prosecuted for failing to do so.

- Veterinarians should (be able to) educate, inform and influence the major dog welfare stakeholders to protect and improve animal welfare.

- Clearly animal welfare science is an important aim in veterinary education.
  - Have characterised animal welfare teaching in undergraduate veterinary education and developed a core curriculum.
  - This curriculum is composed of a model syllabus, corresponding learning objectives and a list of essential Day One Competencies enabling vet graduates to fulfil their role as primary advisers on animal welfare.
  - The curriculum was designed to be readily adapted and implemented at all European veterinary schools.
  - The programme has now been adopted, is being inserted into the vet school evaluation system and is freely available www.fve.org

*Conclusion: the way to maximise dog welfare whether it be in the veterinary practice setting or the home is through education!* www.animalytics.nl
Welcome!

Welcome to Animalytics. Animalytics is a company set up to help animals and those interested in their well-being. The philosophy behind animalytics is the application of analytical thinking to the resolution of animal behaviour and welfare problems using evidence based yet empathetic techniques whilst concomitantly respecting the human-animal bond.

Want to know more about animal behaviour and animal welfare and see some interesting behaviour cases? Then check us out regularly on Facebook. For current animalytical activities and hot topics, follow us on Twitter. New updates weekly!!!
References


Roshier AL, McBride EA. Canine behaviour problems: discussions between veterinarians and dog owners during annual booster consultations. Veterinary Record 2013;172(9):235.
