

Responsible Reporting

- **Veterinary professionals are often reluctant to report cases of suspected abuse and neglect** for the following reasons: fear of being sued, fear of testifying and fear of social media backlash. Well, here is the good news!
 1. **Those who report cases are protected from legal action by the Animal Protection Act.**
 2. Testifying in court rarely happens and is not as scary as you might think!
 3. Although there can be some negative fallout on social media from a client who is reported, most sites, such as Yelp, Yahoo & Vet Raves, will remove degrading posts upon request and explanation of the situation!
 4. Since the Mandatory Reporting AbVMA resolution in July 2019, there has been a 500% in clinic-initiated reporting of abuse cases. This reflects an increase in the rate of reporting -- these cases were always there. The vet can now say "I have a legal obligation to report this." Previously our profession, as a whole, did not fully consider that this is something that society expects / wants us to do.
 5. Based on very rough estimates, each veterinarian likely sees between one and three cases per year.
 6. In a controlling situation, the most common people that victims may be allowed to go to are the **hairstylist** and the **veterinarian**. Because of this, these are the people who are most likely to be able to identify and help the victim.
- Did you know that in a case of abandonment, a clinic is legislated to take care of an animal for 5 days, post expected retrieval date? The retrieval date must be clearly communicated to the client and documented in the medical record.
- What are the implications of not reporting cases of animal abuse or neglect?
 - Moral obligation vs legal obligation (consider your professional code of ethics)
 - Voiceless victim remains voiceless
 - Owner feels implied approval of neglectful behaviour
 - Further individual animal suffering
 - Hidden animal suffering in the home
 - Animal cruelty is often an extension or precursor to other crime and domestic violence
 - Veterinary clinic hopping (to avoid getting the care a pet needs)
- If you are not sure whether you should report a case, call a Peace officer directly for some advice! Here is a list of the Peace officers in Edmonton:
 - Peace Officer Grey: (780) 915-7729 brianne.grey@edmonton.ca
 - Peace Officer Rogiani: (780) 721-5618 olivia.rogiani@edmonton.ca
 - Animal Protection Officer Line: (780) 496-7388
 - Constable Ilka Cunningham: (780) 217-2920 ilka.Cunningham@edmontonpolice.ca
 - Constable Ted Dyck (780) 289-2187
 - Dr. Margaret Doyle: (403) 279-8747

- **The LINK:**
 - Animal cruelty is a predictor: Children or people who are cruel to animals are likely, in the future, to be cruel to people
 - Animal Cruelty is also an indicator: in homes marred by animal cruelty, we also see other forms of violence or cruelty. When animals are abused... people are at risk. When people are abused... animals are at risk. The strong bond between people and animals allows for them to be used as weapons, and frequently become collateral damage.
 - 60% of households with child maltreatment showed evidence of animal abuse and 80% of households with child physical abuse showed animal abuse
 - 75% of warrants executed on animal charges in the US find evidence of other criminal activity! 59% of victims who left their abuser delayed leaving a violent situation out of concern for their animals. It is possible this number is higher as it only reflects the ones who have left. 36% of victims reported that there had been a threat or harm to an animal. 85% of threats to animals were carried out, 85% of these had children witness the threat.
 - Alberta has the highest number of domestic abuse calls in all of Canada.
 - If you are not sure you should report a suspected case of animal abuse or neglect, remember the LINK!
- **What is Elder abuse?** Typically, the elderly person is coerced by threats or harm to pets and there is financial or material exploitation. These threats can be physical, emotional or psychological. The abuser may be a family member, a tenant, typically a younger male and older female but this can vary. The veterinarian may witness that the older client is showing neglect of self/animals.
- **Why don't Veterinary teams recognize these cases?** We are empathetic and don't want to believe that people deliberately abuse animals. We don't want to see abuse. We will make any excuse not to see abuse. Many people in our profession are terrified of conflict, are terrified of telling someone they aren't doing a good job. It is common for veterinarians to want everyone to like them. We are trained to have difficult conversations about 'when to euthanize' and animal abuse is the same way. Need to train our brains to add abuse to our list of differential diagnosis. Look for it like any other disease process.
- **Maltreatment can be either abuse vs neglect.** Abuse = physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse. Neglect = lack of provision of food, water, shelter, grooming, veterinary care.
- Of all cases reported, only 3% are charged; the majority of cases reported are resolved by educating pet owners, finding services so pets can get the care they need and the owner can find the help they need!
 - a. **Danger of "Implied Approval" from Vet Team.** If owner refuses treatment, and they are told their pet may pass away but we do not get a declining medical advice form signed/reported -- then the animal suffers but it's "allowed" because it was given as an option by the vet. Owner may think this behaviour is humane and OK; what about future pets? All clinics should be using an "against medical advice" form to protect the clinic from liability and animals from neglect or abuse

- **“Re-thinking” your medical records:**
 - When you make instructions in the medical record describing treatment needed for the pet: it is important to change your verbiage to **‘required’** instead of saying ‘recommended’. When ‘required’ is used, it empowers the bylaw and police officers to mandate the treatment.
 - Veterinarians need to learn to include these terms in your medical records which reflect increasing degrees of suffering:

Comfort >> Discomfort >> Distress >> Pain

- Distress = this term has legal implications and is important to include in medical records. It is defined as “a state of suffering which an animal can not escape from, or adapt to, due to external or internal stressors that result in negative effects on well being.” These terms may be somewhat subjective, however they need to be somewhat consistent for what would impression would be found across a group of your veterinary peers.
- Include **non-accidental injury (NAI)** as a differential diagnosis when you can not rule it out.
 - Look for injuries that are inconsistent with the history. For example: an indoor cat with broken ribs that is bleeding from the mouth and a history that the client may have “heard the toilet seat fall on them”. Look for an overall lack of history. Look at the behaviour of the owner / animal. Look at the type of injury. For example:
 - rib fractures - solitary rib fractures are more suggestive of NAI than of HBC
 - repetitive injuries - multiple different occurrences
 - tail pull injuries
 - fractured fangs
 - subcutaneous emphysema
 - multiple occurrences in the same house
 - unexplained deaths, particularly in young animals (examine DOA animal remains that are dropped off)
 - any of the above combined with clinic hopping
 - A large number of animals that have never been seen (hoarders)
 - implication of a specific person - common to be told who was kicking or hurting the dog. An extended family member, a neighbor. **Do not ignore these claims, see that they are reported.**