

Neuter or Spay ... The Right Way

In an age of high volumes and multiple locales, guidelines promote consistent veterinary care

BY JAMES HETTINGER

Spay/neuter programs may be all over the place, but the quality of care they offer doesn't have to be.

That's the underpinning of a new report by an Association of Shelter Veterinarians task force, published in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* (Vol. 233, No. 1).



The large number of dogs and cats being euthanized is a problem that reaches across geographic areas and touches a variety of demographic groups, the report notes. As efforts to reduce pet overpopulation have increased, spay/neuter services have sprung up in a wide range of locales, from animal shelters to mobile and stationary clinics, MASH-style operations, private practitioners' offices, and veterinary colleges, according to the report.

These programs aim to "provide quality spay-neuter services to high numbers of patients on a regular basis," the authors note. But because there are so many spay/neuter programs in such a diverse range of settings, a need for guidelines has arisen—guidelines that point the way toward standards for appropriate care in any venue.

The association responded to the need by convening the task force of 22 veterinarians from throughout the United

States. The group's recommendations cover the spay/neuter process from pre-operative to postoperative care, touching on anesthesia and surgical practices in between. "It is the Association's hope," the task force members write, "that these guidelines will help to establish the consistency and professionalism necessary for the veterinary profession

to promote spay-neuter programs as a means to end the overpopulation of unwanted dogs and cats."

Recognizing that regional differences exist and hoping to enhance rather than replace current state practice acts, the task force kept its guidelines broad. The panel believes its suggestions

"represent practical recommendations that are attainable by the vast majority of spay-neuter programs."

The report's recommendations include:

- Animals awaiting new homes should be neutered prior to adoption, as early as 6 weeks old. "Neutering prior to adoption is likely to improve the odds that adopted animals will be retained in their new homes," the report notes, "because being sexually intact has been identified as the leading risk factor for owner relinquishment of cats and dogs."
- Drug doses should be calculated accurately, taking into account the animal's weight and health. "Given the high-volume nature of many spay-neuter programs, veterinarians may be tempted to use predetermined or standardized drug doses," the report notes, but such a one-size-fits-all approach can lead to

the overdosing of smaller animals and the inadequate dosing of larger ones.

- Operations should be performed in a room or an area that's dedicated to surgery, with the necessary equipment for anesthesia and patient monitoring readily available.
- Each spay/neuter program needs a consistent means of identifying animals who have been sterilized. Tattoos are recommended for the abdominal skin of female cats, while free-roaming and feral cats should have an ear tip removed.

The report concludes that spay/neuter programs "are the best antidote to mass euthanasia," as well as the most humane and fiscally responsible way to address the overpopulation problem. AS



Reason #231 to go to Animal Care Expo: Those of you who wandered through the exhibit hall last spring in Orlando may have seen a unique booth amidst the usual array of vendors. The banner at the back read: *Amy Briggs: Recent college graduate seeking career within animal care organization.* As fate would have it, *Animal Sheltering* was seeking a production and marketing manager—and we're pleased to announce that Amy has joined our staff. For other great reasons to go to Expo, check out animalsheltering.org/expo!