

## SESSION OVERVIEW

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### Dr. Janet Scarlett

*Panel members were Dr. John New, Dr. Margaret Gruen, Dr. Margaret Slater and Joyce Briggs (see separate documents for individual presenters' materials).*

*Program Partner: National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy*

On the day preceding this session, researchers reported on the progress that has been made toward the development of effective non-surgical sterilants for dogs and cats since the second international symposium in 2004. Speakers in this session spoke to the reasons that non-surgical approaches to sterilization are so *urgently* needed; they reviewed data from recent or ongoing epidemiologic studies that provide estimates of the magnitude of homelessness and euthanasia among cats and dogs in the United States. The session ended with an economic analysis of the costs associated with the development of non-surgical sterilization compared to using those invested funds to surgically neuter more animals.

Epidemiologic studies are conducted to gather information about the frequency and causes of diseases or conditions. The conditions of homelessness (with its attendant suffering) and premature death (resulting from euthanasia) have been the subject of increasing numbers of epidemiologic studies over the past 10 years. A few of these studies were reviewed in this session.

**Dr. John New** presented data from a study of over 6,500 American households providing estimates of birth rates among owned dogs and cats, numbers of canine and feline litters and litter sizes, percentages of planned and unplanned litters, and proportions of households owning animals that gave birth during the year preceding the study. Not surprisingly, almost twice as many households reported having at least one litter of kittens compared to those reporting at least one litter of puppies, and the numbers of litters of kittens was more than double that of the number of litters of puppies. When asked about the planning that was associated with the birth of these litters, more than *twice as many kittens were unplanned compared to puppies*. These data highlight the need to reach a small but significant proportion of pet owners whose animals continue to reproduce despite the availability of surgical neutering.

Data are needed not only pertaining to owned animals, but also relating to unowned animals in animal shelters. **Dr. Margaret Gruen** described a feasibility study, funded by NCPPSP, that is currently under way to estimate the number of dogs and cats managed by animal shelters annually in the United States and their sources and dispositions. This initiative seeks to develop a consistent, standardized surveillance system within a few select shelters throughout the country to monitor trends in the number and character of animals entering shelters and to enhance public awareness of issues regarding homeless pets. These data will include information regarding the

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numbers of intact animals entering shelters and provide estimates of the potential market for non-surgical sterilants in the U.S. shelter population.

Shelter animals represent only one component of the homeless pet problem in the U.S. Another prominent component, particularly with regard to cats, is free-roaming animals. **Dr. Margaret Slater** described the status of free-roaming cats. The number of free-roaming cats is estimated to be at least a third that of owned cats. Free-roaming cats include owned, outdoor, formerly owned, and feral (never socialized to humans) animals. These cats are largely sexually intact and are believed to contribute substantially to the numbers of cats in shelters. In light of their numbers and high fertility, these animals are one of the most important target populations for non-surgical sterilants. The nature of this population underscores the need for inexpensive, easily administered and safe non-surgical products.

The need for non-surgical sterilants was emphasized in the preceding discussions, but the question remains: Can funds planned for investment in non-surgical sterilants be put to more effective use to surgically neuter more animals? Using data from a variety of sources and focusing only on the economic implications, if the \$10 million sought for non-surgical contraceptive research was invested in surgical neutering on an annual basis, would more progress toward ending pet homelessness be made? The answer was a resounding “no.” Having a non-surgical sterilant (with the properties discussed above) has the potential to save over \$63 million per year in the humane and veterinary communities, said **Joyce Briggs**.

In summary, non-surgical contraceptives are urgently needed to save the lives of millions of dogs and cats in this country. The investment of money in research to develop and market one or more products will have economic returns well in excess of the investment and will save the lives of millions of dogs and cats in the U.S. annually.