

SESSION OVERVIEW

Moderator: Dr. Stephen Zawistowski

Panelists: Wayne Cavanaugh, Dr. Gail Golab, Betsy McFarland, Joan Miller

**IMPLICATIONS FOR DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS OF DIFFERENT PROFILE PRODUCTS:
PERSPECTIVES FROM DOG BREEDERS, THE VETERINARY FIELD,
ANIMAL SHELTERING, AND CAT FANCY**

Dr. Stephen Zawistowski
Science Advisor, ASPCA; Board Chair, ACC&D

ACC&D's 5th International Symposium highlighted the strides that researchers and scientists are making toward the "holy grail" of safe, effective, affordable options for non-surgical sterilization for dogs and cats. However, this is only half of the equation, the other half being a receptive audience. The benefits of new products will only be realized if there are stakeholders who welcome their arrival and put them to use.

Four panelists, each an expert in his or her respective field, spoke about the possible role of non-surgical options in their work and the factors that warrant attention as the field advances.

Wayne Cavanaugh (President, United Kennel Club) presented potential uses of non-surgical contraceptives and sterilants among dogs in competition (particularly field trials and performance events), as well as among working and service dogs. More broadly, he spoke about the shifting sources of purebred puppies in past decades (from show/competitive breeders to commercial breeders). This change has removed relationships between breeder and buyer and, with it, the breeder's influence in ensuring a puppy gets spayed or neutered.

Mr. Cavanaugh presented several potential applications for non-surgical products, many of which have not received extensive attention or discussion to date:

- Temporary contraception for performance and field participants who plan to breed after competition period;
- Permanent sterilization for performance participants with no plan to breed;
- Inexpensive choice for shelter/rescue dogs participating in performance events;
- USDA requirement for non-surgically contraception of puppies going through Pet Distribution Centers en route from commercial breeders to pet stores;
- Guiding Eye dog breeding programs;
- Therapy and Service dog breeding programs;
- Policy and Military dog breeding programs; and
- Working farm dog breeding programs.

Mr. Cavanaugh also posed questions and concerns about non-surgical options that would warrant consideration before use, including, but not limited to, short-and long-term health concerns and identification of dogs sterilized without surgery.

Gail Golab (Director, Animal Welfare Division, American Veterinary Medical Association) spoke on behalf of the veterinary community. She emphasized that veterinarians with widespread backgrounds and areas of focus are interested in non-surgical options; this is by no means a field limited to feline and canine practitioners. Consequently, Dr. Golab encouraged veterinarians in the audience to “think broadly, because the work that you are doing here provides huge opportunity for not only companion animal veterinarians, but the veterinary profession in general.” She addressed multiple topics related to non-surgical sterilization and the veterinary field:

- Why veterinarians sterilize animals, and how the multiple motivations and rationales for sterilization must be considered as we look toward use of non-surgical sterilants;
- Factors that warrant consideration when selecting a means of sterilization, including efficacy, safety, infrastructure and personnel needs, cost, compliance, and the expectations and attitudes of clients;
- The potential strengths and known or potential shortcomings of both surgical and non-surgical options, and the concerns associated with each; and
- The features of a non-surgical product most likely to be adopted by the veterinary community.

Betsy McFarland (Vice President, Companion Animals, The Humane Society of the United States) works with shelters, rescues, and spay/neuter clinics throughout the U.S. She started her talk with a brief overview of animal sheltering today: much progress has been made, and euthanasia rates are dramatically lower than in the 1970s. Most of this is thanks to spay/neuter; we have become experts and spay/neuter, and presently over 80% of owned pets in the United States are sterilized. The two areas where this encouraging percentage does not apply, however, are free-roaming cats and underserved communities.

This segued into a discussion of areas within or related to animal sheltering where non-surgical options could be particularly valuable:

- *Free-roaming cats:* With a very small percentage of free-roaming cats currently sterilized, there is significant potential for non-surgical options to advance efforts to curb reproduction within this population.
- *Underserved communities:* Community assessments conducted through The HSUS’s Pets for Life program show “pet resource deserts” in certain zip codes of American cities, with one consequence being spay/neuter rates that are the opposite of the national average: 80% of pets are not sterilized. Different tools and more creative approaches are necessary to more effectively reach pets and caretakers in these communities. Non-surgical options would be less time- and resource-intensive than surgical spay/neuter; they would also address some owners’ resistance to and/or fear of surgery for their pets.
- *Animal sheltering:* There is the potential to deploy tools to the field that would make it easier to spay/neuter pets and achieve zero euthanasia in shelters. In shelters per se, a non-surgical product could be very useful due to the capital expense associated with surgical facilities and the time savings associated with not needing to surgically sterilize every animal. Non-surgical sterilization could also expedite an animal’s move through a sheltering facility.
- *Poor surgical candidates:* Some animals are simply not good candidates for surgery, and we currently don’t have options for this population. This would help us chip away at the problem.

Joan Miller’s (Chair, Outreach and Education, Cat Fanciers’ Association) presentation shared the results of a survey that she distributed to find out what breeders of pedigreed cats think about non-

surgical sterilization. The survey response was impressive: 700 respondents from 34 countries in one week. Respondents were mostly breeders in light of the channel through which the survey was distributed, but Ms. Miller also received responses from cat show judges, former breeders, and veterinarians, and pet owners. The study covered a series of questions that provide excellent insight into management of reproduction overall, and particularly the types of non-surgical options that would be most valuable:

- Current approaches to controlling reproduction among the kittens and cats, both while in a breeder's care and after a sale;
- Control of heat cycles among breeding cats, with very different approaches taken by European and American breeders;
- Reproductive health challenges experienced by breeding cats, some of which could be ameliorated by non-surgical options; and
- Respondents' interest in both safe, reversible contraceptives for female cats, as well as interest in permanent non-surgical sterilization for male and females, cats and kittens.

Our sincere thanks to these four panelists for speaking during the Symposium's opening session about the possible use of non-surgical options in their fields. They offered thoughtful, thorough perspectives, and both the panel and the Symposium as a whole were stronger for their participation.