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Dr Doug Bryden
Post Graduate Committee in Veterinary Science
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22nd August 1991

Dear Doug,

Please find the enclosed. I hope that you can find space for
the C & T article.

Best wishes,

Tom Lonsdale

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ORAL DISEASE IN CATS AND DOGS

The foetid stench of stale blood, dung and pus emanating from the mouths of so many of my patients has finally provoked this eruption of discent.

The sheer numbers passing through the practice, when extrapolated to the developed world situation, tells me that oral disease is the source of the greatest intractable pain and discomfort experienced by our companion animals. (Imagine having a mouth ulcer or tooth ache, not for a lifetime but just one day.)

When we stop to evaluate what is happening we see that this is a great and mindless cruelty we visit upon our animals from the whelping box to the grave.

The internal factors are these.

Puppies and kittens cut their deciduous teeth between 2 and 6 weeks of age. An inevitable consequence of this is gingivitis. A diet of processed food ensures lack of gum massage and the gingivitis persists. The growing animal develops grooming behaviour and adds hair and faecal material to the accumulated food scraps clogging the interdical spaces.

Between 4 and 6 months of age the permanent teeth erupt into a soup of blood, pus and saliva. The gingivitis is now well established and not infrequently one finds a young kitten or puppy with a complete set of deciduous teeth hanging from inflamed gingival shreds.

Even on a diet of processed food the deciduous teeth must eventually fall out. The permanent teeth come to occupy a diseased mouth and by this time the animal has learned not to chew on anything because of the pain involved.

The exquisite mechanism of teeth and gums designed by nature to be cleaned massaged and stressed in use is left to rot. Compare mining machinery properly maintained which can excavate a mountain but by disuse can be rendered useless.

A lifetime of inescapable pain is bad enough. The sequelae of endocarditis, iliac thrombosis, nephritis, and all those other entities attributable to a permanent septic focus finally condemn this situation as being intolerable.

The external factors are these.

Foremost are the pet food manufacturers who have effectively promoted their 'complete diet only water needed'. After petroleum the second biggest industry world wide, this great industry has pursued profit at the expense of widespread pain and discomfort.

Reacting to the now universal dental needs of our animals the dental instrument, the dental machine and even the imitation bone industries have flourished.

Veterinary practitioners have reacted passively and provided some dental care as an afterthought and virtually no advice. Since cats and dogs don't complain, owners don't realize and don't seek advice. Vets just don't seem to be pro active in this vital area.

The latest absurd development is the emergence of 'Dental specialists'. Their raison d'être is palliative care and whose primary client education is to encourage tooth brushing of cats and dogs at six monthly 'prophys'. (Dental treatment under general anaesthesia)

What's to be done.

Simple give our cats and dogs their basic rights of a healthy functioning mouth. Supply raw chicken wings, chicken necks or oxtail to young / small kittens and puppies when they most want to chew and explore. Older larger dogs need raw bones.

The external commerce driven system may take a while to dismantle. It did not exist before the 50's and now it seems such an inescapable part of life.

Well the profession can do much to re-educate itself and in turn the public. A few practice surveys and university based research projects would set the course.

The biggest villains, the pet food manufacturers, will contort themselves in every direction to protest their innocence. (Uncle Ben gives bi annual prophys to its research animals, personal communication). However they may be persuaded to voluntarily print cautionary advice

on their packaging. Failing that a few class actions by agrieved pet owners would probably work wonders.

What benefits can we expect?

Innumerable. Pets will be fed on cheap unprocessed bi products some of the time. The environment will benefit, clients will be an average \$1000 per animal / per lifetime better off. Certainly the pets can be expected to live longer as they enjoy their lives seeking to steal the bones out of the freezer.

Practitioners need not worry about the bottom line. Animals will be pain free, healthier, live longer and grateful owners will have more money to spend at the vet.