



## Veterinary Behavior: Say No to Punishment-Based Approach

A new position statement released by the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB) warns veterinary professionals about the use of punishment-based dog training techniques, which can cause serious behavioral problems.

"For the general public, punishment can be defined as the use of force/aversion, coercion, or physical corrections in order to change an animal's behavior," said Sophia Yin, DVM, MS, director of media relations for the AVSAB. The scientific definition of punishment, which is included in the position statement, is different, she added.

Although many books written in the last decade focus on positive reinforcement, a television show titled "The Dog Whisperer" has stoked the popularity of the punishment-based method, which veterinary specialists call outdated and — at times — dangerous for pets and their owners. Short televised segments can mislead pet owners about the time investment required for effective behavior modifications, said Yin, who added that inconsistent reactions from pet owners can exacerbate anxiety in dogs, which may lead to aggression.

"When people focus just on stopping the problem, they are just trying to put fires out," she said. "They are failing to address the fact that the reason the pet engages in these behaviors is that the behaviors have been inadvertently rewarded."

By issuing the position statement, behavior specialists hope private practitioners will warn clients about punishment-based approaches and refer them to credentialed professionals who can address root causes for behavior problems and suggest effective solutions.

Instead of yelling at dogs, holding them down in an "alpha roll," or using choke chains or pinch collars, Yin and the AVSAB suggest taking a holistic perspective to the issue. "A more appropriate approach is to determine how the pet is being rewarded for the bad behavior, remove that reward and control the environment, and reward a more appropriate behavior."

While punishment-based approaches may seem to work — especially on half-hour televised and staged segments — they can cause long-term repercussions for pet and owner.

"...the techniques force the dog to mask the behavior while the dog becomes more anxious," Yin said. As a result, "many dogs are likely to get worse/more aggressive in the future."

## One Health Takes Shape: Doctors Collaborate

Close to 200 human and animal doctors met in Rhode Island last month to discuss zoonotic disease and ways the two medical communities can work together in the future. A second event, to be held Dec. 2, 2008, is in the planning stages.

"One of the human doctors said it was electric," said Cathy Lund, DVM, past president of the Rhode Island Veterinary Medical Association (RIVMA), and one of three organizers. "Nobody says that about continuing education."

Approximately 178 professionals, half of whom are veterinarians, attended the two-day event titled Pets, People and Pathogens: Be a Victor Not a Vector conference. In the days following the conference, several veterinary groups contacted organizers about using the conference as a model for future get-togethers and set the stage for future collaborations between animal and human doctors, Lund said.

The event was described as "a direct response to the One Health Initiative," said Miriam Giles, director of continuing medical for Coastal Medical in Rhode Island, one of the organizers, in reference to an industry-wide collaboration between the American Veterinary Medical Association and the American Medical Association.

Coastal Medical worked with the RIVMA to plan the conference, which was held in Providence on Dec.

7, 2008, and was covered by consumer media outlets.

After listening to panel discussions and presentations, attendees identified several areas of overlap between the human and veterinary fields, Giles said. "If nothing else, we're definitely going to see more of these events." Specific references were made to the benefits of sharing information about cancer, mosquito vectors, and Methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), she added.

"It used to be that we were these little planets revolving in our own spheres," said Lund. Judging from the conference success, that will no longer be the case, she added. [[return to top](#)]

## Required Reporting: Rabies Vaccines

A growing number of veterinarians in the U.S. are required to report rabies vaccines to government offices, and while some professionals dislike the law, two doctors in Florida are refusing to abide by it. Doctors cite client confidentiality concerns and a fear that required reporting will push pet owners to get dogs vaccinated in areas that do not require reporting, or that the law will decrease the number of pets that receive vaccinations. At least 10 states have counties that require reporting.

"Veterinarians are caught between a rock and a hard place," said Glenn Kolb, executive director of the Oregon Veterinary Medical Association. "They don't want to betray client confidentiality but are obligated" to report the information.

To learn whether your practice is required to report the information, visit the American Association of Veterinary State Boards website.

The laws, which began appearing on county and state legislative dockets several years ago, provide governments with a financial reservoir because employees can compare rabies certificates with licenses. However, there is also a public health benefit to collecting the data, said Millicent Eidson, DVM, MA, DACVPM, president of the National Association of Public Health Veterinarians.

An animal's rabies vaccination history "is essential in making appropriate decisions in accordance with national guidelines" if the animal was exposed to rabies or has potentially exposed a person or another animal, she explained.

"Some of the possible decisions include euthanasia or quarantine of the animal and a human bite victim undergoing a month-long series of expensive rabies vaccinations and injection of immune globulin in the wound site," she added. "These decisions have serious consequences, and the rabies vaccination history should always be obtained to help make appropriate decisions."

Although Eidson understands concerns about client confidentiality and fears that information could be used to reveal business information, she pointed to strict confidentiality laws enforced by government agencies and encouraged veterinarians to discuss their concerns about the protection of the information with governmental agencies.

In Oregon, the VMA effectively blocked state legislation but three counties have passed the required reporting rules. Some of those counties compensate veterinarians for providing information. In some areas, veterinarians receive \$1 for renewing certificates and \$2 for new vaccines, Kolb said. [[return to top](#)]

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