

Medically Unnecessary Veterinary Surgery

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Introduction

Owners of animals in Ontario continue to retain the right to request and consent to surgeries on an animal, this is inclusive of surgeries which the general public may refer to as “cosmetic” in nature.

Society continues to raise concerns related to the performance of unnecessary surgery, and more specifically to the altering of an animal [ear cropping, tail docking (cows, dogs) or nicking (horses), declawing] where there is no medical reason to support the procedure.

Veterinarians, as advocates of animal welfare¹, are generally not supportive of any procedure on an animal that is neither necessary nor based on sound scientific evidence. The interplay between these competing interests and positions presents a constant ethical dilemma for the veterinarian which challenges decision making in practise.

Definitions

Client: Client means, with respect to a veterinarian, the owner of an animal(s) or group of animals that the veterinarian is treating, an authorized representative of the owner, or an individual who the veterinarian reasonably determines is acting in the interest of the animal(s) or group of animals.

¹ College of Veterinarian of Ontario – *Position Statement: Animal Welfare*



Medically Unnecessary Veterinary Surgery: Medically unnecessary veterinary surgeries are those that are either not required or are not in the animal’s overall best interest. The College of Veterinarians of Ontario (the College) uses the broad term “medically unnecessary veterinary surgery” (MUVS) rather than “cosmetic surgery,” as the term “cosmetic” is open to changing and subjective interpretation.

Position

A licensed veterinarian is authorized in the *Veterinarians Act* to perform any surgical procedure that has been determined by a veterinarian to be reasonably appropriate and necessary for the animal in that specific circumstance, and in keeping with an established veterinarian-client-patient relationship (VCPR). Veterinarians make recommendations to clients about surgery on an animal based on the best available evidence for the need to perform the surgery under the circumstances, including the risks and benefits, and any alternatives.

While the College, in alignment with broad based veterinary opinion, does not support any unnecessary surgery to an animal(s), it is of the opinion that without similar and consistent changes to other legislation relevant to animal welfare, any restriction on veterinarians performing specific surgical procedures could create unintended consequences that would not support safe animal care.

Further, the College supports veterinarians in their leadership of the education of clients who request “medically unnecessary” surgeries in an attempt to influence their choices and perspectives in the interests of any and all animals.

Resources

The following can be found at the College’s website at cvo.org:

1. *Position Statement: Animal Welfare*

College publications contain practice parameters and standards which should be considered by all Ontario veterinarians in the care of their patients and in the practice of the profession. College publications are developed in consultation with the profession and describe current professional expectations. It is important to note that these College publications may be used by the College or other bodies in determining whether appropriate standards of practice and professional responsibilities have been maintained. The College encourages you to refer to the website (www.cvo.org) to ensure you are referring to the most recent version of any document.