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EDITOR'S NOTE

A Voice For the Suffering

“Humanity’s true moral test, its fundamental test ... consists of its attitude towards those who are at its mercy: animals.”

— Milan Kundera

Animal cruelty is a widespread phenomenon that has serious impact on animal welfare, the wellbeing of individual animals, and our society, as well as veterinary medicine in general. A pivotal question that must be answered is this: what constitutes abuse or neglect in our patients?

Research has identified acts of animal abuse and neglect as indicators or predictors of crimes against people. Acts of violence against animals are frequently associated with domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, and other violent antisocial behavior. Publications in the early 1960s prompted the identification of distinct signs of child abuse, such as multiple fractures in different stages of healing and retinal hemorrhages. Some of these signs might apply to animals; however, to my knowledge, no veterinary

Caring Too Much?

In the January/February 2020 issue of *Today's Veterinary Practice*, I will address another aspect to this issue, which places us in an ethical dilemma—how do we help an animal that is suffering from systemic illness but is not treated due to the client's inability to pay for the treatment of their pet? Just how far do we interpret the part of our veterinary oath that states, “I solemnly swear to use my scientific knowledge and skills ... for the prevention and relief of animal suffering”?

scientific publication has described them. While human medicine has responded over the years to these issues, it is now beyond time for veterinary medicine to take a leadership role in the recognition of and response to violence, abuse, and neglect directed at animals.

Why haven't veterinarians taken a leadership role in recognizing and responding to abuse directed against animals, many of which may end up being our patients? In many cases, it may be the result of inadequate training in identifying and reporting animal abuse, as well as a poor understanding of the characterizations and origins of animal cruelty. Additionally, we may not be comfortable on how to handle the issue of client/patient confidentiality or how to address suspected abuse, keeping in mind our own personal safety, liability, and business reputation. We may also be uncertain as to where we should draw the “line in the sand” with respect to what constitutes neglect of a pet, rather than obvious abuse.

Undoubtedly, a lack of response from the veterinary profession to individual situations is not because of a lack of concern or the belief that we should just look the other way. We are legally and ethically required as a profession to report suspected cases of abuse and neglect to an appropriate authority, but there are problems with being on the frontline that make this harder than it sounds.

Fortunately, there are several resources available to veterinarians to help with resolving these practical and ethical dilemmas. The AVMA website includes information about U.S. regulations for each state, in addition to providing guidance in how to be proactive rather than reactive when in these situations. For more information: [avma.org/KB/Resources/Reference/AnimalWelfare/Pages/Animal-Abuse-Resources-for-Veterinarians.aspx](https://www.avma.org/KB/Resources/Reference/AnimalWelfare/Pages/Animal-Abuse-Resources-for-Veterinarians.aspx)

Animal abuse is more than just a professional concern for veterinarians; it is a crime. It's nearly 2020, and we need to find our voice for the suffering. **TVP**