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EDITOR'S NOTE

For Whom the Bell Tolls

"How little we know of what there is to know."

— Ernest Hemingway

The Dutch Kennel Club has become the first international kennel club to ban the registration of several brachycephalic breeds, including: pug, King Charles spaniel, Boston terrier, English bulldog, French bulldog, Pekingese, Japanese chin, Shih Tzu, Griffon Bruxellois, Griffon Belge, petit Brabançon, and Affenpinscher.

This sent shock waves through breed and kennel clubs around the world, including the American Kennel Club (AKC), which sent a statement in support of continuing "to aggressively work against overt attempts to control breed type and to continue to pursue education and scientific discussion of thoughtful ways to address health issues *within a breed* in a way that protects and preserves the essence of the breed." Although the reasoning for this ban may be based in part on recent legal amendments that have established specific requirements for the breeding of pet animals in the Netherlands, this action seems to be a death knell for some who have dedicated their lives to supporting pedigree breeding worldwide. The AKC currently states on its website that its government relations team can support individuals and groups in efforts to prevent such bans in the U.S., seemingly an indication that there is valid concern of similar laws in the future.

Several veterinary groups support the ban, including the Federation of European Companion Animal Veterinary Associations, which has campaigned to stop the suffering of pets that develop serious health issues as a result of breeding for morphological features such as brachycephalic skulls. However, some worry that the ban will start importation and exportation of these breeds from other countries or take breeding underground, where breeders will not have to adhere to healthy breeding rules. It is on this basis that The Kennel Club (U.K.) has stated there is no intention to follow its Dutch neighbors, opting to continue its approach of working with breeders, vets, scientists, and welfare organizations to take evidence-based action to eliminate the health problems that the breeds can face. Such evidence-based positive change will obviously take a lot of time and money and in some breeds change their recognizable physical attributes or even eradicate the breed as it is currently known.

So where does the U.S. veterinary profession stand—or where should we stand? It goes without saying that we are faced with a plethora of medical issues, some of which are more common in certain breeds than others, many of which are due to physical conformation, and some of which create ethical treatment dilemmas. We're stuck in a position between humane groups that believe our profession may be facilitating the purebred dog crisis and our oath to treat the patient that comes to us.

A 2017 AVMA policy on "Inherited Disorders in Responsible Breeding of Companion Animals" encourages veterinarians to educate breeders and owners on the responsibilities involved with breeding companion animals. This is consistent with guidance from the American Animal Hospital Association, whose position statement suggests that "Breeders should ensure their breeding programs strive to eliminate hereditary disorders and minimize genetic defects." Other countries' veterinary bodies have gone a step further—the British Veterinary Association strongly recommends that animals with conformations that negatively affect their health and welfare should not be used for breeding. Guidelines and recommendations exist, but there are no laws yet.

It seems a decision remains: veterinarians can either stand now to support scientifically driven positive breeding programs or support breed bans. But can we just stand by? TVP