Vancouver Clinic reports on first year

A spay-neuter program is a vital part of any effective animal control effort.

The first reduced fee spay/neuter clinic in Canada reports some interesting and useful results after its first year in operation. More than 12,000 surgeries were performed during 1976-1977 by the Vancouver Regional Branch of the British Columbia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

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The Branch is responsible for animal control in 11 municipalities around Vancouver. Its policy is to neuter every animal leaving the shelters.

Secretary-manager C. Jack Homes reports that while pet owners may not have a genuine concern about the pet overpopulation problem, they will respond to the advantages to them of having their pets sterilized. Consequently, the Branch publicizes these advantages whenever possible -- better health for the animal, reduced tendency in males to roam, elimination of the inconveniences of the female "heat" period, and of course, prevention of unwanted litters.

While castration has traditionally been unacceptable to many pet owners, the ratio of castrations to spays in Vancouver is well above that in many similar clinics. Homes attributes this to significantly lower license fees for castrated males.

There had been some concern about the clinic being used by people who could easily afford the services of a private veterinarian, so pet owners coming to the clinic during the first year were surveyed about why they came.

Of the dog owners, 83% said they can now afford to have their animals neutered because of the clinic (their dogs were generally the larger breeds), and this reason was given by 24% of the cat owners. Twelve percent of the dog owners were having their dogs sterilized to qualify for lower license fees, and 5% of the dog owners (6% of the cat owners) said they wanted a bargain.

More than 1000 animals were pregnant when sterilized -- so more than 4000 animals were prevented from being born to be destroyed later. Homes reports that an amazing 91% of the owners were not aware of their pets' pregnancies.

The clinic was opened with funds from several municipalities and from humane groups and private citizens -- however, it was viable after the first month of operation.

Homes has traveled to Puerto Rico; Dallas, Texas; Columbus, Ohio; and other locations as a consultant on similar spay/neuter facilities.

How to obtain sodium pentobarbital

Many animal shelters have been hesitant to turn to sodium pentobarbital for euthanasia because of the belief that it is almost impossible to obtain.

However, the procedure for a shelter to obtain sodium pentobarbital is "relatively uninvolved," according to the Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Department of Justice. In a letter to HSUS, Compliance Division Chief Ronald W. Buzzco said that the only requirement is that the DVM, properly licensed by the appropriate state authority, obtain a DEA registration as a practitioner in the desired schedules at the address at which the pentobarbital will be stored and used. The DVM can use the order forms issued to him for the purposes of purchasing pentobarbital.

"The pentobarbital which is ordered in this manner will be delivered only to the registered location. Provided that it is allowed by existing state laws, the drug may be administered to animals at the direction of the attending DVM, but he need not be present to receive shipments of drugs nor at the time of administration. Of course, the normal recordkeeping requirements are also to be observed.

"If...the respective state authority recognizes clinics or societies, then DEA will attempt to accommodate such registrations at the federal level." (Currently, Virginia, Maryland, Indiana, Washington and Maine allow clinics and shelters to obtain sodium pentobarbital directly.) Buzzco wrote, "In view of the fact that this agency cannot register a humane companion organization to handle controlled substances, it became obvious to us that it was necessary to provide some alternate method by which such organizations might obtain pentobarbital."

HSUS has two free publications on sodium pentobarbital for euthanasia. Titled "Legal Steps for the Procurement of Sodium Pentobarbital" and "How to Administer Sodium Pentobarbital," they are available from SHELTER SENSE, HSUS, 2100 L St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037.

A three-week workshop on humane education is being offered by the Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas, June 26-July 13. HSUS participants will include Dr. Michael Fox, director of the Institute for the Study of Animal Problems; John Dommers, director of the National Association for the Advancement of Humane Education; Charles F. Herrmann, HSUS News editor; and Douglas Scott, HSUS Gulf States regional director. For complete information, write Dr. G.W. Willingham, Professor, Elementary Education, Box 3017, SFA Station, Nacogdoches, Texas 75962 (telephone: (713) 569-2904).

(Tuition is $55 for Texas residents, and $150 for all other participants. Dormitory rooms are $4 for a single, and $2 per person when two share a room.)