

## WVA NEWSLETTER - JANUARY 2021

### A MESSAGE FROM THE WVA PRESIDENT: DR. PATRICIA TURNER



#### The Plight of the Unseen

Dear Colleagues,

For many countries and regions, the new year has begun with hope regarding the distribution of several highly efficacious vaccines that will be used to protect people from developing SARS CoV-2 infections and disease. Meanwhile, veterinary professionals around the world continue to adapt their methods to provide care to animals in the communities in which they work.

I wanted to share some results from an informal survey that the World Veterinary Association conducted in December regarding veterinary care of dogs and cats. A short 21 question survey was developed by the Animal Welfare Strategic Focus Group and distributed to Council members as well as ad hoc experts who support the WVA's work. The overall results from this survey were similar to those obtained from other recent veterinary association surveys and publications\*, indicating that most companion animal clinics had been able to carry on providing services for their clients, albeit in a very different way.

Many veterinary associations have also reported a reduction in companion animal relinquishment during this time as well as a decrease in the number of euthanasia requests being received from clients. There was an initial fear that animal abandonment might increase because of unfounded fears of cats or dogs transmitting the virus to their human caregivers. Media messaging has largely addressed those concerns and with a few notable exceptions, such as farmed mink, interspecies transmission of the virus has not been a significant issue. Some respondents also indicated that although they were able to see clients, in their region of the world, they were experiencing shortages of vaccines and other veterinary medicines because of trade disruptions. For companion animals, several concerns were voiced about possible separation anxiety experienced by animals when owners return to work, as well as possible increases in relinquishment or abandonment if people return to their workplaces and are unable to provide the same level of care as during the pandemic. Finally, with a reduction of in-person community and social services, it has become more difficult to gain visibility of possible cases of companion animal neglect, hoarding, and abuse.

Our survey also asked questions about stray and unowned cats and dogs and how their plight might be affected during the global pandemic. Some respondents indicated that it has been very hard for these dogs and cats to find food throughout the pandemic since markets and restaurants have largely closed and congregation of people within communities has been restricted. Stray cats on mink farms were often euthanized during the mink depopulation events to reduce possible transmission of the SARS CoV-2 virus.

Additionally, rabies vaccination programs and spay/neuter clinics have been halted in many communities because of the pandemic. Together, these comments suggest that welfare of stray and unowned dogs and cats in many communities may be at risk and communities may be in danger of losing gains made in other public health programs, such as elimination of dog-mediated human rabies.

While we are by no means at the end of this global Covid-19 pandemic, we have significant experience and knowledge concerning how to protect ourselves and others. It is important for veterinarians to continue to work together with other local and regional public health officials and nongovernmental organizations to develop a plan for safely moving forward with community animal vaccination and spay/neuter programs. Plans also need to be made for ensuring continued care of community-owned dogs and cats. It goes without saying, of course, that any plans made must ensure adequate protection of human caregivers. If you have experience, ideas or stories related to managing these activities in your community during the pandemic, please feel free to reach out and share these with us.

**Yours respectfully,  
Dr Patricia Turner  
World Veterinary Association, President**

\*Morgan L, et al. Human–dog relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic: booming dog adoption during social isolation. *Humanit Soc Sci Commun* 2020, 7:155. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-020-00649-x>

**The WVA needs your expertise and opinion in preparing a cohesive global message on our role as veterinarians for the global public good. As Constituent & Observer Members of the WVA, we welcome your input in our discussions! Don't be left out of the process!**

**PLEASE FORWARD THIS INFO-NEWS TO YOUR MEMBERS**

If interested in learning more, please contact:

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