

LARGE-VOLUME **SPAY**



WHAT THEY ARE.
WHY THEY EXIST.

NEUTER FACILITIES

Approximately four million companion animals are euthanized every year in the United States. While these numbers have dramatically decreased over time, it is still shocking to read. In Michigan, the numbers are just as relevant. In 2010, 91,333 dogs were admitted to shelters and 30,634 (approximately 33%) were euthanized. Even more striking is that in 2010, the Michigan Department of Agriculture reported that 106,968 cats were admitted to the 163 shelters across the state, and approximately 57% of those cats were euthanized. It boils down to this: roughly 90,000 companion animals were euthanized across our state last year because they had the misfortune to enter a shelter, and as the rise in popularity of the No Kill Movement and high volume spay/neuter programs make their way across the country, private practitioners may need to raise their awareness of this issue and in turn, evolve into new areas of practice.

Looking at the numbers above may surprise you, but the historical perspective is just as interesting. Merritt Clifton, editor of *Animal People*, reports that:

- In 1970, 23.4 million cats and dogs were euthanized and at this time, society started sterilizing pet dogs.
- In 1985, 17.8 million cats and dogs were euthanized and at this time, society began sterilizing pet cats.
- In 1993, 5.7 million cats and dogs were euthanized and at this time, society began performing OHE/OE procedures on feral cats.
- In 1997, 4.9 million cats and dogs were euthanized and at this time, the popularity of Pit Bulls (the breed most likely to be euthanized) began to grow astronomically.
- In 2000, the euthanasia rate was approximately 4.2 million but in Clifton's estimate, the occurrence of the 9/11 terrorist attack resulted in a loss of funding for spays and neuters.
- In 2004, Clifton stated that the number of euthanasias across the United States rose to 4.9 million, a repeated number from seven years ago, in large part because of the aforementioned popularity of Pit

Bulls. At this time, they made up 33% of all dog intakes in shelters, often near 50% in urban areas. According to Clifton, the euthanasia rate for Pit Bulls was 93%.

A major societal impact of the above numbers has been a ground swell of animal advocates who have taken up the cause of the sheltered animal. In the last decade, we have seen this cause manifest itself in our daily lives within ASPCA and HSUS advertisements for donations. Grass roots movements, like the No Kill movement, have also made an appearance, and we have seen a growth in local and national programs as well, such as the No More Homeless Pets Conference sponsored by Best Friends Animal Sanctuary held annually in Las Vegas, and locally, the Michigan Partnership for Animal Welfare Conference, which works to educate rescue organizations and shelters. In fact, just last March Michigan saw its first No Kill Conference in Ann Arbor. Within these conferences, shelter medicine has become a popular track and the formation of the Association of Shelter Veterinarians shows that this issue is on the radar. However, at the same time, on the professional level, we have seen veterinarians cease

providing shelter medicine when they felt burned out with private practice or as a new graduate, couldn't find a job elsewhere.

The message behind shelter medicine always seems to come back to spay/neuter as the way to solve the plight of homeless pets. As a result, spay/neuter programs have become front and center and sizable grants are now available to fund these programs. The Humane Alliance (humanealliance.org) facilitates the development of large volume spay/neuter programs and houses the National Spay/Neuter Response Team, which trains those interested in opening a similar program. A typical expectation for those programs trained by the Humane Alliance is that, at minimum, 5,000 dogs and cats will be sterilized yearly.

In Michigan, there are currently four operating programs that have been trained by and follow the model of the Humane Alliance: C-SNIP (Grand Rapids); All About Animals (Warren); Capital Area Humane Society (Lansing); and P.A.W.S. Michigan (Taylor). Details about each program are listed below.

C-SNIP

Pat Schoen from C-SNIP gives the following history for this organization, "C-SNIP was organized in 1999 with the first surgery performed in 2001. To date, C-SNIP has performed over 78,000 surgeries. C-SNIP was one of the first nonprofit, high quality, reduced cost spay/neuter clinics to open under the Humane Alliance model. C-SNIP has mentored and trained, over 10 veterinarians and surgery staff wishing to learn or improve high volume spay/neuter techniques under the tutelage of Dr. Jeffrey Adams, Medical Director; In 2009,

C-SNIP began participation with the MSU veterinary externship program; In 2009, C-SNIP partnered with another non-profit spay/neuter clinic in a nearby county and contracted to perform surgeries utilizing the same protocol and C-SNIP veterinarian's and staff to work at that location." Pat Schoen, Executive Director says "this model provides a "win-win" for both clinics as this relieves some of the high demand/wait time for surgeries at our Grand Rapids location and reduces transportation costs for the clients. The surgical anesthetic protocols at C-SNIP are identical to those at All About Animals: Acepromazine IM for dogs, and Acepromazine and buprenorphine IM for cats. Induction and maintenance anesthetic protocols are, for dogs, Telazol IV and Isoflurane for maintenance after intubation, and for cats, Telazol IM for induction and Isoflurane for maintenance of anesthesia. All cats are intubated except cat neuters (mask is used if necessary). Pain management is as follows: dogs receive morphine IM and Metacam SQ at surgical preparation. Cats are given buprenorphine IM as a pre-medication and Metacam SQ at the time of surgical preparation. Owners are given the option to receive analgesics for their pets at the time of discharge.

All About Animals

Procedures are provided for approximately \$40 per cat and \$80 per dog. There is no means testing to prove economic need but they do conduct a survey and have established that the majority of procedures are done for low income individuals, for whom they further subsidize approximately 30% of the procedures. When Amber Sitko, Executive Director of All About Animals, was asked what motivated their endeavor into the spay/neuter arena, she wrote, "We formed in June 2005 with our primary focus on adoption and renting vet clinics one day a month to spay/neuter cats at no charge to the clients. Very quickly, it became obvious that we would never be able to adopt our way out of the pet overpopulation problem, there are just too many unwanted pets, and that spay/neuter is the answer. As someone said—"If your water pipes break and your basement is flooded, which do you do first, start bailing or turn off the water?—spay/neuter your pets!" We strongly believe that

spay/neuter is the most effective use of resources to attack the problem. So, in 2008, we opened up the spay/neuter clinic so we could start fixing those pipes!" In 2010 this organization performed 13,000 spays and neuters.

Capital Area Humane Society

The Capital Area Humane Society opened their spay and neuter clinic in South Lansing in February of 2011. According to Julia Palmer, CEO the clinic was built to address the growing demand for low cost spay/neuter services offered in the shelter facility. With a previous capacity to do about 2,500 public surgeries a year, the organization was turning away a high volume of individuals who had a high need for low cost spay and neuter options. The clinic expansion increased capacity for public surgeries from 2,500 surgeries annually to 8,400. In the first 8 months of operation the clinic served well over 4,000 animals. "We are in the business of saving lives. With the number of homeless animals in our community, we understand that making spay/neuter available to all animals is the only viable solution." The fee schedule for CAHS is as follows: cat OE, \$25; cat OH, \$50; dog OE, \$75; and dog OHE, \$100. They do not require proof of economic need prior to performing sterilizations, and use the following anesthetic protocols: pre-medication is a combination of acepromazine, buprenorphine and glycopyrolate for both cats and dogs. Induction is accomplished with ketamine and diazepam IV except in aggressive animals, when Telazol is used IM. Maintenance is with Isoflurane after intubation. Post-operatively, ketoprofen is given and Rimadyl is sent home if the owner requests it.

P.A.W.S. Clinic

Executive Director Kris Jordan stated, "The P.A.W.S. of Michigan rescue group incorporated in the fall of 2007 as a dog and cat fostering/adoption organization. In January 2008, P.A.W.S. began a Spay/Neuter Assistance Program (SNAP) to fund or subsidize the cost of surgeries for families who could not otherwise afford to sterilize their pets. We utilized the Humane Ohio spay/neuter clinic in Toledo (also a Humane Alliance model clinic) as well as All About Animals for surgeries for our SNAP, with volunteers

either coordinating transport vans from the clinic, or transporting the animals to the clinics in their own vehicles. To date, P.A.W.S. has funded, subsidized, or provided transport for over 1,500 animals through SNAP. We also organized and ran a monthly transport program for shelter animals from the City of Wyandotte municipal shelter to Humane Ohio. P.A.W.S. Clinic opened its doors September 19. Its anesthetic protocols are comparable to All About Animals and C-SNIP. It quickly became apparent that the need for low cost spay/neuter services far outweighed the means of our SNAP, so P.A.W.S. applied to the Humane Alliance National Spay/Neuter Response Team (NSNRT) in summer 2009. The intervening time until we opened The P.A.W.S. Clinic was spent raising the start-up capital for the clinic. P.A.W.S. Michigan used the money it raised for the clinic to launch The P.A.W.S. Clinic as a separate 501(c)3 corporation. We are still closely affiliated with P.A.W.S., but the clinic is run as an entirely separate organization. At the clinic, the charge is \$45 for a cat (spay/neuter); \$25 for a free-roaming cat (TNR); \$80 for a dogs (spay/neuter) up to 75 pounds, \$90 up to 99 pounds, and \$105 over 100 pounds. P.A.W.S. requires a rabies vaccine (\$12) if the owner cannot provide proof of a current vaccine. A rabies vaccine is included at no charge for free-roaming cats. They offer a few other services as well, including distemper and bordetella vaccines, microchipping, flea medication, and deworming (at the time of surgery only). P.A.W.S. Clinic does require bloodwork (done elsewhere) prior to performing sterilization procedures on animals 8 years or older and will place an IV catheter and run fluids on patients they are concerned about. Procedures are only done after being examined by a veterinarian and age and health has been taken into consideration.

So, what is the bottom line? First and foremost, we as veterinarians must realize that there is a large segment of the public that is aware of national and local euthanasia numbers while, generally speaking, only a small segment of private practice veterinarians are aware of these same numbers. This segment of our public, including representatives of the Michigan Pet Fund Alliance, has brought the No Kill

advocacy program into our state. At the first Getting to the Goal Conference in Ann Arbor last March, the euthanasia numbers from Michigan shelters were printed for the evaluation of the 250+ attendees and furthermore, save rates for the 150+ shelters in Michigan were calculated, ranked, and published. It is advisable that, as veterinarians, we are, at the very least, familiar with these numbers if we are going to claim we are experts in animal welfare. It is crucial that we recognize what is happening inside the shelters around our practice because, as this movement continues, our clients will begin to engage us in the shelter euthanasia discussion.

The continued euthanization of four million animals across the country has resulted in active animal advocacy and the birth of the Humane Alliance model. Again, further discovery of these numbers will continue to educate the general population about the existence of these high volume spay/neuter programs. While veterinarians are employed by these nonprofit organizations, they typically are not the CEO or president of such organizations. For the private practitioner there is the concern about the financial impact on our own practices because many of our sterilization procedures are being done elsewhere. In fact, in a study subsidized by Maddie's Fund and performed by Frank and Carlile, Frank shows the following "Even if private spay/neuter procedures did decline from low cost spay/neuter programs, the program can still be beneficial if there is less than 100% substitution. This would indicate that even though some cannibalization of procedures occurred, at least some customers brought in by discount programs were on the margin in terms of that decision and would not have otherwise sterilized their animal. However, not only was there no substitution (i.e., no negative relationship) seen between the two types of spay/neuter procedures, there was in fact a highly significant positive relationship observed in both models. On its surface, it may seem counterintuitive that offering a discount spay/neuter program would increase regular spay/neuter procedures performed in a community" (firepaw.org/analysisprogramswebversion). This quote certainly supports that we as practitioners must recognize that we have little power to prevent these organiza-

tions from becoming part of the veterinary landscape and we will have to evolve into new areas of practice in order to compensate for the financial loss.

Another concern for veterinarians is not only that OHE/OE procedures are being offered at a significantly lower price in shelters than in most private practices, but also whether the procedure itself is being performed according to acceptable standards of care. To that end, anesthetic and analgesic protocols have been shared by the four large-

am faced daily with the fallout of animal overpopulation. I deal with a ticking clock every day, a clock that ticks for potential euthanasias on each and every animal that comes through the shelter doors. It is a daunting task to look at the faces of those animals and wonder which ones will be fortunate enough to leave the shelter and live a happy life.

We have a saying that began with our director and is stated by every staff member at our shelter: *out the front door, not the*



volume spay/neuter operations in Michigan and all procedures are performed with sterile packs, which are not used for more than one animal without first performing autoclave sterilization. In reviewing the OHE/OE procedures performed at a large volume spay/neuter facility and comparing it with practices in our own clinics, we may note that IV catheters and bloodwork are not being routinely placed and performed. The question that each of us must ponder is whether it is mandatory to do the latter two procedures in order to reduce the number of euthanasias across the state. In our own practices, is it a deal breaker if a client states that they cannot afford a catheter and blood work?

On a personal level, as a veterinarian in an open-admission county shelter, I

back. My hope is that my private practice colleagues attempt to understand the plight of the animals that I and other shelter medicine veterinarians see on a daily basis and begin to self-refer the underserved population of pet owners to large volume spay/neuter facilities. If we as veterinarians can help facilitate sterilization for this group of animals, it may result in breaking the four million euthanasia milestone that has now existed for over a decade.

Many thanks to Stacy Anderson, MSW, LMSW, for editing this article. In addition to being Dr. Anderson's stepdaughter, she provides behavior therapy and education to children with autism and their families. She is a graduate of the University of Michigan and Wayne State University and in her free time is an avid concert-goer, supporter of the Slow Food movement, and blog writer at everylittlethingblog.com.