Oral presentations

Homeless people and their dogs: a study of health and welfare and the human-companion animal bond (H-CAB)

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OBJECTIVES

Pet ownership is common amongst the UK's growing homeless population. Pet ownership can have positive impacts on physical, psychological and social health. For homeless owners, some of the most vulnerable members of society, dogs provide a crucial source of support and companionship. In spite of these benefits, dogs often exist as barriers to homeless services such as accommodation.

The study aims were to assess the impact of pet ownership and the H-CAB on the health and wellbeing of both homeless owners and their dogs.

METHODS

Participants were recruited from services that accommodated homeless dog owners; Nottingham's Vets in the Community clinic and other outreach initiatives, and by direct approach to homeless owners on the streets. The PDSA's Petwise MOT was used to assess canine health and welfare. Semi-structured interviews were used to investigate the implications of the H-CAB, these were anonymised, transcribed and analysed thematically.

RESULTS

Preliminary results suggest that the health and welfare of dogs belonging to homeless owners is not significantly compromised and that dogs often provide crucial support for issues such as mental ill-health, drug and alcohol abuse. Initial findings also indicate that many homeless owners struggle to access services as a result of their dog.

STATEMENT (CONCLUSIONS)

Dogs belonging to homeless owners provide key sources of support and companionship, often helping them manage physical, psychological and even social health. Contrary to the opinion of some, the health and welfare of these dogs is not significantly compromised by the homelessness of the owner, although specific challenges were identified.

Why didn't my client give the medication? A descriptive study of the communication surrounding medicine administration

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OBJECTIVES

Adherence with medication is critical to achieving optimal patient health outcomes. Unfortunately, there is limited evidence regarding factors affecting adherence in veterinary medicine. The aim of this study is to describe the communication surrounding medicine administration.

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METHODS

Clients attending six practices for specific health problem appointments were invited to participate in the study, which involved consultation recording and post-consultation surveys. If the pet was prescribed medication, drug labelling information was recorded, and the client was contacted 4–8 days later to complete a survey regarding adherence. Descriptive statistics were performed and proportional frequencies of responses reported.

RESULTS

Of the 65 consultations recorded, 43 were prescribed medication. Of these 29 responded, giving a response rate of 67.4%. Adherence was 100% in 27.6% (8/29) of respondents but assessment of adherence wasn't possible in 69% (20/29) due to drug formulation (e.g. oral liquid) or deficiencies in drug labelling; dosing duration was not stated on the medication label for 86.2% (25/29) of

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prescriptions. One respondent elected not to give the medication. Only 55% of clients reported being shown how to administer the medication, and if they were shown, 75% reported being shown by their vet. Finally, 83% of clients reported no discussion of their personal situation to assess the suitability of the treatment schedule.

STATEMENT (CONCLUSIONS)

Despite the small sample size, this study highlights significant issues in the communication of medicine administration which could affect adherence and subsequently patient outcomes. A larger study is needed to evaluate the scale of the problem.

Factors that affect intended adoption of reward-based training reported by a cohort of puppy owners

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OBJECTIVES

Almost all dog owners use reward-based training methods, but some additionally use aversive methods (e.g. physical reprimands, sound/spray distractions). Our objective was to identify factors associated with intended use of training approaches that used only reward-based methods.

METHODS

A nested case-control study was conducted on a sample of owners of puppies <16 weeks of age, living in the UK

and Republic of Ireland recruited to a longitudinal study. For owners with >1 study dog, one dog was randomly selected for analysis.

Associations between intended training methods (reward-based methods only/training that included >1 aversive method) and potential risk factors (previous dog ownership, owning ≥1 other dog(s), dog-related employment [e.g. dog trainer, rehoming centre] and intentions for the dog) were tested using Chi-square ($\alpha \leq 0.05$).

RESULTS

Of 819 owners, 256 (31.3%) intended to use only reward-based methods. Owners who worked with dogs were three times more likely to report intention to use reward-based methods only, compared with owners without such employment (OR = 2.87, 95%CI = 1.79–4.60, $P < 0.001$). Compared with owners who did not own another dog, owners with ≥1 other dog(s) were more likely to report intentions for training based only on reward-based methods (OR = 1.60, 95%CI = 1.19–2.16, $P = 0.002$).

STATEMENT (CONCLUSIONS)

Intention to use a mixture of reward-based/aversive training methods was very common within this cohort, despite existing evidence of the disadvantages of using mixed training approaches. Increased awareness of optimal training approaches for dogs is needed, especially for owners without dog-related employment and without other household dogs.

Opinions of veterinary graduates on the value of an undergraduate veterinary practical class

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OBJECTIVES

It is widely accepted that animal tissue is required for teaching veterinary students various aspects of anatomy and physiology in their undergraduate years. Yet what are the views of veterinary graduates on the use of such practical classes in their education? Here the opinions of veterinary graduates were sought on the value of one practical class during their preclinical training and the justification for that class.

METHODS

Fifty veterinary graduates were surveyed by e-mail asking for their opinions on the value of a preclinical practical class which aimed to demonstrate the effect of different