

Elective Surgery -Cropping Dogs Ears
Dr Al Stinson, DVM |

To: Michigan Veterinary Medical Association leadership. Legislation that affects the practice of veterinary medicine in other states

Elective Surgery - Cropping Dog Ears

Vermont Legislature - 2005 - 2006 Session

Subject: Crimes and criminal procedure, humane treatment of animals, cropping dog ears.

Statement of purpose: This bill proposes to prohibit cropping a dog's ears for cosmetic purposes. A violation would result in a civil fine unless the person has a prior violation or the cropping was conducted by someone who is not a licensed veterinarian or was done without providing the dog with anesthesia, in which case it would constitute cruelty under Vermont's existing statute prohibiting mutilation. The bill does not prohibit owning, harboring, selling, buying, or adopting a dog with cropped ears or showing a dog with cropped ears in a dog show or competition

How can one possibly disagree with this objective; it is the practice of veterinary medicine and must be performed by a licensed veterinarian. (I prefer to use the term "elective surgery.")

Legislative Intent: According to the American Veterinary Medical Association, ear cropping in dogs for non-therapeutic reasons is neither medically indicated nor of benefit to the patient. This procedure causes pain and distress and as, with all surgical procedures, is accompanied by inherent risks associated with or related to anesthesia, blood loss and infection.

Oops! What other surgical procedures are performed for non- therapeutic reasons: removal of the ovary and uterus are operation widely supported by the veterinary profession. Must these organs be pathologically defective before it is medically indicated. Who decides whether it is beneficial for the patient?

The owner? The veterinarian? The Vermont Legislature?

What about dehorning and castration for cattle, sheep, pigs and horses; docking pig's tails; debeaking chickens? Are these surgical procedures the next to be declared mutilation?

Cropping Dogs' Ears: "Ear cropping," means the surgical alteration, manipulation, or removal of any part of a dog's ear so that the ear then heals in a pointed, erect or severed state.

Manipulation is a vague term. It could be most anything.

"Therapeutic purpose" means a medically necessary procedure to address disease or injury of the dog's ear or to address a condition that jeopardized the dog's health.

Therapeutic purpose does not include the prevention of an ear infection The last sentence in the above statement is very interesting. One of the reasons for spaying

and neutering (elective surgery) is to prevent pregnancy and infections. But it is ok to perform an ovariohysterectomy to remove normal, non-pathologic organs?

Also mutilation?

Subsection b. No person shall perform or otherwise arrange for the performance of an ear-cropping procedure on a dog.

What is the next elective surgery to be prohibited? Tail docking?

Subsection c (1) A person who violates subsection (b) of this section shall be assessed a civil penalty of not more than \$3,000.00 for the first offense.

What penalty does the Vermont law provide for practicing veterinary medicine without a license? Is it more or less \$3,000.00?

Subsection (d) This section shall not apply to a procedure performed by a licensed veterinarian, with appropriate anesthesia, **solely for therapeutic purposes.**

Does the same penalty apply to a licensed veterinarian who does the surgery for cosmetic purposes at the request of the owner?

Personal Comments:

This is the kind of legislation that I label "slippery slope" or incrementalism. It seems to accomplish a reasonable goal, however, it sets a template for later amendments to include not just ear cropping or just dogs, but will be expanded to include tail docking, dew claw removal, dehorning, debeaking in poultry and anything a veterinarian might wish to do to meet the need of his clients. If elective surgery is acceptable for humans, then, I see no reason to prohibit it in animals.

I sincerely believe that elective surgery is an important service the modern veterinarian performs for his clients as long as he/she uses the surgical skills he/she would use for curative or therapeutic procedures. If the profession allows the animal activist to determine the future of the profession by legislative action, you will come to regret your ability to advance the mutual benefits of the human-animal bond.

Al W. Stinson, D.V.M

Professor Emeritus, College of Veterinary Medicine

Michigan State University

Director of Legislative Affairs

Michigan Association for Pure Bred Dogs

Michigan Hunting Dog Federation

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