

April 21, 2004 Approved HMC

## PROCEDURES IN INSTANCES OF SUSPECTED ANIMAL ABUSE, OR CHILDREN IN NEED OF PROTECTION

### Atlantic Veterinary College Veterinary Teaching Hospital

Veterinarians and support staff who, in the context of a veterinarian-client-patient relationship, suspect animal abuse or neglect shall consult with the senior clinician or Service Chief at the time the suspicion arises to determine whether such concerns should be reported to the appropriate humane agencies. If a senior clinician or Service Chief is not on the premises, the senior person in the service should be notified. Consultations between clinicians should be documented. Clinicians who are on duty alone may call humane agencies without any consultations, based on their own judgment.

In cases of suspected animal abuse where there are known to be children in the family, the suspected animal abuse shall be reported to Child Protection Services.

Similarly, in cases where the animal presented has a history of injuring a child and, in the opinion of the veterinarian, displays a significant or dangerous level of aggression that the clients are not responding to in an appropriate manner, that opinion or suspicion shall be reported to Child Protection Services as per s.s. 22 Mandatory Reporting, Child Protection Act (appended.)

### Background

Animal maltreatment encompasses a range of behaviours harmful to animals, from unintentional neglect (which may be resolved by education) to intentional abuse.

**Definitions**<sup>1</sup>: **Abuse** means every intentional or malicious act, omission or neglect which causes or unreasonably permits unnecessary or unjustifiable pain, suffering or death to animals.

**Neglect** includes failure to provide food, water, protection from the elements, or veterinary and/or other care considered to be normal, usual and accepted for an animal's health and well-being, consistent with the species, breed and use of animal.

Staged dog fighting is one form of animal abuse. Animal hoarding is neglect on a large scale.

In situations that can not be resolved through education, it is the veterinarian's responsibility to report suspected abuse to the appropriate authorities. The reporting of suspected abuse is not considered a breach of veterinarian-client confidentiality under provincial veterinary by-laws.

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<sup>1</sup> Arkow, P. Initiating an animal abuse reporting policy at a Veterinary Teaching Hospital. In Ascione, F and Arkow, P, eds. Child Abuse, Domestic Violence, and Animal Abuse: Linking the Circles of Compassion for Prevention and Intervention. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press 1999:257-259.

Links between abuse of animals and of other family members are well-documented<sup>2</sup>. Note that the animal may be brought in by a member of the family other than the abuser.

## **GUIDELINES FOR VTH CLINICIANS**

### **Signs suggestive of physical abuse (non-accidental injury) or neglect**

None of the following signs is diagnostic, nor does the absence of some signs rule out the possibility of abuse.

- The history doesn't correspond with the injuries presented, or does not support the severity of the clinical signs.
- The owner shows a lack of concern for the injuries.
- There is a delay in seeking veterinary treatment.
- There are behavioural signs, e.g. the animal shows extreme fear in the presence of the owner, depression, and/or failure to thrive. (Note: the animal may not show any fear of the owner).
- There are clinical signs, e.g. old healed or untreated wounds, multiple fractures in different bones in various stages of healing, bruising. (Because of the animal's hair coat, bruises may not be easily detected).
- There are signs of neglect such as apparent malnutrition, severe matting, chronic untreated wounds (possibly with maggots), or chains or collars that are too small and have cut through the skin.

### **Procedure:**

1. If you are concerned about possible abuse of an animal presented to the VTH, report your substantiated concerns to the senior clinician or Service Chief.
2. Document and date all conversations with the client, including comments by other members of the family. Keep detailed physical records and take photographs if appropriate. These should be signed and dated.
3. Where the attending clinician and senior clinician or Service Chief agree that there are grounds for suspicion of physical abuse, the information shall be reported to the PEI Humane Society.
4. In repeat instances of neglect, where client education has been ineffective in improving conditions, the information shall be reported to the PEI Humane Society.
5. If the suspected abuse is extremely serious and people may be at risk, the police may be called.
6. In cases of suspected animal abuse, where there known to be children in the family, the suspected animal abuse shall also be reported to Child Protection Services.
7. If, based on an animal's behaviour and history, it is the opinion of the clinician that the presence of the animal poses a significant danger to children in the family, and if the parents are not recognizing or responding appropriately, that suspicion or opinion shall be reported to Child Protection Services.

**NB** The VTH and its personnel have no jurisdiction to intervene on behalf of an animal's welfare. That is the role of the PEIHS or Department of Agriculture inspectors, who are empowered under PEI legislation to investigate reports of alleged animal abuse and to take custody of animals if warranted.

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<sup>2</sup>Ascione, FR. The abuse of animals and human interpersonal violence; making the connection. In Ascione, F and Arkow, P, eds. Child Abuse, Domestic Violence, and Animal Abuse: Linking the Circles of Compassion for Prevention and Intervention. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press 1999:50-61.

**Important telephone numbers:**

- **PEI Humane Society - 892-1190 or 892-1191**
- **PEI Department of Agriculture (Large Animal concerns) - Jane Palmer - 368-5636**
- **Child Protection Services - 368-5330 (daytime), 368-6868 (evenings/weekends)**
- **Charlottetown police - 629-4172 or 911 (emergency)**

**Resources**

1. Olson P. **Recognizing and Reporting Animal Abuse – A Veterinarian’s Guide.**  
Denver: American Humane Association, 1998. (A copy of this guide is in the duty office.)
2. **Animal Hoarding Research** [www.tufts.edu/vet/cfa/hoarding.html](http://www.tufts.edu/vet/cfa/hoarding.html)
3. **Tufts Animal Care and Condition Scales** [www.tufts.edu/vet/cfa/tacc.html](http://www.tufts.edu/vet/cfa/tacc.html) (attached).
4. **PEI Companion Animal Protection Act** December 2001
5. **PEI Animal Health and Protection Act** April 1991
6. **PEI Child Protection Act** 1988