

Build Your Practice by Offering Early Age Spaying & Neutering

“Change is the law of Life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future.” — *John F. Kennedy*

This prophetic quote comes to mind when I consider the resistant that early age spaying and neutering has endured for the more than 14 years since veterinarian Leo Lieberman introduced his challenging commentary favoring the sterilization of neophyte (8 to 12 weeks) or juvenile (3 to 5 months) puppies and kittens. Since then, the early age procedure has been systematically studied and initial concerns regarding the health, development and safety of the patient have been shown to be groundless. Additionally, today’s anesthetics have proven to be well tolerated by the youngsters.

As a doctor who owns four/neuter clinics, each averaging 40 or more surgeries daily, I can report that surgery for those younger than five months is not only less involved but requires less time with fewer to no complications and a speedier recovery. In addition, early age spaying/neutering affords new opportunities to help veterinarians build their practices. Those who can adapt to offer this protocol will be able to access a previously untapped market and to generate new business and potentially lifelong clients; those who do not, will be left by the wayside.

Why do many veterinarians still refuse to spay/neuter at younger than six months? I’m convinced that this reluctance has more to do with the practitioner’s inability to see the need for and advantages of change than for any medical reason. By offering early age spay/neuter procedures, veterinarians can make a positive, profound impact on both the overwhelming societal problem of pet overpopulation (macro picture) and on the individual pet and pet owner (micro picture). They become heroes in their communities by giving rescuer groups, foster caregivers, shelters, etc., the ability to offer their wards “Neutered Before Adoption” (NBA).

Data indicates that 10-15% of new pet ownership comes from shelters or private caregivers. Private placement caregivers report that their sterilized wards are almost always chosen over those still intact. They are desperately seeking veterinarians who will sterilize the neophyte for early placement while adhering to their forward-thinking NBA ideals. Shelter adoptions often require post-adoption arrangements with a participating veterinarian where the new owners are instructed to pick up their pets at the clinic after surgery. This gives the participating hospital an opportunity to create new lifetime clients — what a practice builder!

When I speak at veterinary conferences, I ask my colleagues to include spay/neuter in their puppy/kitten wellness programs. Along with vaccinations, parasite control, diet and behavioral care, veterinarians should confidently recommend and promote sterilization to coincide with the last vaccination of the series. Pet owners do not resist this idea. Typically, the vaccination and the spay/neuter would be scheduled at three months for kittens and four months for pups. The dog owners would receive the rabies and sterility certificates and be set to obtain a license. This is convenient for the pet owner, and it prevents the chaos of raging hormones and “oops” litters which occur all too frequently due to procrastination in scheduling a spay.

This month, the US Postal Services introduces the first class 37cent Spay/Neuter stamps featuring a pup and kitten that were sterilized at early ages. With awareness raised to a national level, it is a perfect time to rethink the importance of early sterilization. As a profession,

we should not be the last to embrace one of the single most effective solutions to our largest silent pet killer...euthanasia.

For a copy of Dr. Mackie's speech "Early Age Neutering: Perfect for Every Practice," presented at the North American Veterinary Conference 2000, visit www.ahimsatx.org/easn/easnm.htm

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