

Maine Veterinary Fact Sheet Animal Cruelty in Domestic Violence: What Every Veterinary Practice Should Know

- ★ **Pets are part of the family.** This comes as no surprise to all of those professionals working with countless clients and their beloved pets who receive health care from Maine Veterinarians. In fact nearly 65% of the overall US population has pets - and the percentage increases to 75% for families with young children. Pets experience the same family dynamics as the human members of the family, including domestic violence. Injuries to pets are a method to keep a woman from leaving the abusive environment for fear of what may happen to her loyal companion - her pet.
- ★ **Why should a veterinary office be concerned about domestic violence and how pet injuries happened?** After all, the pet is being presented for medical care so there can't be intentional abuse, right? Wrong! Here are some of the statistics: In a famous Utah study of women in domestic violence shelters, 71% reported that their pet was threatened, harmed or killed as part of the domestic violence cycle with 54% reporting the pet actually experienced injury or was killed. Threats, injuries and death to beloved animals by batterers are commonplace when domestic violence occurs. Furthermore, a 2007 study reported that when pets are also hurt, the human victims of domestic violence are at much higher risk of serious harm. When pets are abused we have cause to worry about both the pet and the other family members.
- ★ **In Maine, the law recognizes the need to protect companion animals from domestic violence.** In fact Maine was the first state in the nation to enact a law including companion animals in protection from abuse orders. This is so important because domestic violence victims tell horrendous stories of abuse to their pets. They also tell of their reluctance to leave a pet behind to suffer at the hands of the batterer.

Maine law also allows veterinarians to report suspected animal cruelty and newly enacted legislation now mandates that veterinarians report aggravated animal cruelty. Both of these laws provide protection from civil and criminal action for veterinarians making good faith reports.
Additionally, the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) proclaimed its position on cruelty to animals, animal abuse, and animal neglect in 1994. *The AVMA recognizes that veterinarians may have occasion to observe cases of cruelty to animals, animal abuse, or animal neglect as defined by state law or local ordinances. When these observations occur, the AVMA considers it the responsibility of the veterinarian to report such cases to the appropriate authorities. Such disclosures may be necessary to protect the health and welfare of animals and people.*
- ★ **In Maine animal cruelty is a crime.** There are both civil and criminal avenues for prosecuting animal cruelty depending upon the facts of the case. In the case of aggravated cruelty the felony provisions within the criminal code will apply.
- ★ **What can you do if you suspect animal cruelty?** Please report suspected cruelty to either local law enforcement or to Maine's Animal Welfare Program. These agencies will investigate the complaint and take appropriate action. You may be called on to testify as to the nature of the injuries - to document the facts of the case. While concerns regarding veterinarian-client relationships may keep veterinarians from reporting suspected animal cruelty, please note that the health and well-being of both animal and humans alike may rest on your willingness to report and to testify. You are therefore helping to make your community safer for all.
- ★ **Domestic abuse is a serious crime.** Acts of family violence create environments of fear, domination and injury to all family members. On average half the homicides in Maine are the result of domestic violence. As of August 19, 2008, of the 24 homicides in Maine this year, 15 have been identified as domestics. Domestic Violence requires a serious, prompt and caring response from all who suspect it.

For more information or training about the Link contact: www.LinkageProject.org, a program of Youth Alternatives Ingraham ~ 207.874.1175 or the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence 207.941.1194 ~ www.MCEDV.org