

PAWS for Action – Spay Neuter Awareness
To run 2/7/2016

February is Spay/Neuter Awareness Month and the last Tuesday of the month is World Spay Day. This is an annual campaign of the Humane Society of the United States and its affiliates. It is intended to highlight the positive impact of affordable, accessible spay/neuter in reducing animal suffering and euthanasia rates. February 23, 2016 will mark the 22nd annual World Spay Day.

There is little opposition to affordable spay/neuter however, what does exist has proven to be formidable. The opposition in Alabama has made multiple attempts to close existing clinics over the past few years. It has managed to prevail in barring the opening of new low cost spay/neuter clinics and has even had the effect of closing one of the few existing clinics in our state when they could not find a veterinarian willing to take the constant attacks from the Alabama Veterinary Medical Examiners.

When I arrived in Alabama, in June of 2012, I heard that making high-volume low-cost spay/neuter more available would not be effective in reducing Alabama's high euthanasia rates. Although common sense tells us that it should work I did not, at that time, have data to disprove what was being said.

Later I discovered a vault load of data to the contrary. High-volume, low-cost spay/neuter clinics make a huge difference in every community where they have been permitted to operate, reducing euthanasia rates dramatically. Not only does this strategy work, it works quickly, within one to two years a community will see results.

Another disparagement to the high-volume low-cost movement which was being spread at the time was the assertion that pediatric spay/neuter was harmful to animals. I certainly found this concerning but have since read of medical studies with opinions that run counter to this thinking.

Recently I came across another article on the benefits of pediatric spay/neuter. According to Dr. Lila Miller, DVM and VP of Shelter Medicine for the ASPCA, "pediatric surgery is much less physiologically stressful." In females, "it has a strong protective effect against the development of mammary gland neoplasia later in life."

I have heard of private practice veterinarians who recommend waiting six months or even a year before having puppies and kittens altered. The obvious risk in using this guideline is that the animal will breed prior to surgery. And once again the population is increased exponentially and euthanasia becomes the most expedient, and perhaps the only, realistic solution for many municipal animal shelters.

Pediatric spay/neuter is an important component to fighting high birthrates among companion animals. When these young pets are altered prior to adoption it ensures a reduced birthrate.

No solution is perfect, whether owners have their pets spayed and neutered at a young age, or after they have a litter, or whether they leave them intact for their lifetime. But there is an optimal solution. Pediatric spay/neuter minimizes shelter euthanasia, which continues to be the leading cause of death in cats and dogs in the U.S.

Bobbi Yeo lives in Opelika, AL. She is the CEO of PAWS Humane in Columbus, GA, an animal shelter and veterinary clinic offering low-cost spay/neuter and other services to the public. Email her at byeo@pawshumane.org with your comments and story ideas.