

**Sunday Column – Is the Cure Worse?
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Several years ago I took my cat to the vet for his annual checkup which included an annual vaccine regimen. However, this time the veterinary assistant informed me that the vaccine could, potentially, cause a sarcoma (cancerous tumor) at the shot site. For this reason the vaccine would be given in the rear leg and she assured me that if my cat developed a sarcoma they would simply remove the leg and my cat would be fine.

The veterinary assistant seemed to think the protection provided by the vaccine was entirely worth the loss of a leg. I, on the other hand, was horrified. Since then I've discovered that the topic of vaccination frequency is a sensitive issue with many pet owners, veterinarians and pharmaceutical corporations.

The AVMA estimates that there are approximately 70 million dogs and 74 million cats owned in the U.S. If 50% of these animals (72 million) are seen regularly by a veterinarian there is a lot at stake for the pharmaceutical corporations if vaccine frequency guidelines are reduced.

Well, this is just what happened when the American Animal Hospital Association issued revised vaccination guidelines in 2011. Link Welborn, DVM, chaired the task force that developed the new guidelines. In a recent article published by NBC News, Dr. Welborn is quoted as saying, "limited studies suggest that booster vaccinations for many of the core vaccinations last for at least seven years." Given the extended duration of immunity the task force determined that annual vaccinations were not necessary and that three-year vaccination intervals would be a reasonable compromise.

Doing the math, it appears that following the revised recommendations would result in pharmaceutical corporations taking a whopping 67% hit to their annual gross sales revenue for vaccines. You can bet they're not going out of their way to educate or encourage veterinarians to follow the new guidelines.

What about the impact on local veterinary clinics? The loss of vaccine sales is one thing. The larger concern is that if pet owners don't have to come in for the annual vaccines, will they come in at all? This is serious and this is why you probably haven't heard from your vet that the vaccination guidelines changed five years ago.

According to Jean Dodds, DVM, over-vaccination can lead to any number of negative short-term side-effects. These are self-limiting, meaning they will run their course and disappear without medical intervention. However, Dr. Dodds contends that over-vaccination may also lead to more serious autoimmune disease and even cause susceptibility to chronic diseases later in life.

My office contacted three veterinary clinics at random just to find out what their recommendation was on vaccination frequency. Every single clinic said they recommend

annual vaccines. The people answering the phones did not know anything at all about a change in the guidelines.

Full disclosure, PAWS Humane, recommends annual vaccines as well though this is under review.

What is a pet loving consumer to do? I strongly believe we have a responsibility to our pets to become informed consumers and discuss our concerns with our veterinarians. If he or she is not open to this discussion that may be a good sign that you need to find another vet.

Informed pet owners are taking matters into their own hands. They are limiting the frequency of vaccines administered to their pets and even having their animals tested for antigens (titers) before deciding if they should receive a booster vaccine.

Regardless of whether or not your pet is due for a vaccine, he should be examined by a veterinarian annually. Through an examination and lab work a disease can be caught and treated at an early stage, before it is detectable by you.

How about saving money on unnecessary vaccine boosters and spending it instead on diagnostic work and flea and heartworm preventative?

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.