

REASONS FOR MEDICAL CONSULTATION AND CAUSES OF EUTHANASIA OF DOGS IN MONTEVIDEO CITY (URUGUAY): A SURVEY OF VETERINARY PRACTITIONERS. IMPLICATIONS OF BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS

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ABSTRACT

In Latin America there is little information about the frequent reasons of medical consultation and euthanasia in dogs, and the implications of behavior problems. Especially in Uruguay there isn't information about it. The aim of this study was to know the most frequent reasons for medical consultation and euthanasia of dogs in Montevideo city through a survey of veterinary practitioners and the implications of behavioral problems. A survey to veterinary practitioners from one hundred ($n = 100$) randomly sampled veterinary clinics in the city of Montevideo was carried out. The most frequent reasons for medical consultation about dogs in veterinary practitioners are consultations of skin affections, followed by digestive and respiratory affections, and less frequently infections, accidents and neoplasias ($p < 0.0001$). The behavioral problems occupied only the 1% of the reasons for medical consultation in dogs. The most frequent reasons for euthanasia of dogs were by elderly dog and neoplasias, followed by kidney affections, infections and accidents ($p < 0.0001$). Only 35% of veterinarians performed euthanasia for behavioral problems in their clinics. Among them, the euthanasia for behavior problems accounted for only 2%. Although euthanasia is carried out in Uruguay for behavior problems, it is so in a very low percentage.

Key words: canine, euthanasia, medical consultation.

MOTIVOS DE CONSULTA MÉDICA Y CAUSAS DE EUTANASIA DE PERROS EN LA CIUDAD DE MONTEVIDEO (URUGUAY): UNA ENCUESTA A MÉDICOS VETERINARIOS. IMPLICANCIA DE LOS PROBLEMAS DE COMPORTAMIENTO

RESUMEN

En América Latina existe poca información acerca de los motivos frecuentes de consulta médica y eutanasia en perros, así como de las implicaciones de los problemas de comportamiento. Especialmente en Uruguay no hay información al respecto. El objetivo de este estudio fue conocer las causas más frecuentes de consulta médica y eutanasia de los perros en la ciudad de Montevideo a través de una encuesta a los médicos veterinarios, y la implicancia de los problemas de comportamiento. Se realizó una encuesta a una muestra aleatoria ($n = 100$) de médicos veterinarios de clínicas de Montevideo. Las causas

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más frecuentes de consulta médica por dueños de perros son las afecciones de la piel, seguido de afecciones digestivas y respiratorias, y menos frecuentemente las infecciones, los accidentes y los neoplasias ($p < 0,0001$). Los problemas de conducta ocupan solo el 1% de los motivos de consulta. Las razones más frecuentes para la eutanasia de perros fueron por edad (ancianos) y por neoplasias, seguidas por afecciones renales, infecciones y accidentes ($p < 0,0001$). Solo el 35% de los veterinarios ha llevado a cabo eutanasias en sus clínicas; entre ellas, la eutanasia por los problemas de conducta representó apenas el 2%. Aunque en Uruguay se realizan eutanasias por problemas de comportamiento, las mismas se dan en un muy bajo porcentaje.

Palabras clave: consulta médica, eutanasia, perros.

INTRODUCTION

Although the use of euthanasia in small animals is ethically discussed as a treatment (Frid and Perea 2007), in Europe and North America it is considered ethical when the animal is suffering or when prevented from leading a normal life (Houpt *et al.* 2007). Among the most common reasons for euthanasia in dogs have been reported the neoplasias (Bonnett *et al.* 1997, Figuera *et al.* 2008), age (Bonnett *et al.* 2005; Eichelberg and Seine 1996), and accidents (Trapp *et al.* 2010) in several countries of America and Europe. Another of the reasons about euthanasia in dogs is behavior problems, mainly aggression (Fatjó *et al.* 2006). These reasons were observed in several countries around the world. In Scotland, it was estimated that 39% of dog and cats were euthanized for behavior problems (Stead 1982). In USA 50 to 70% of shelter dogs were euthanized for the same inconvenient (Overall 1997). A work in Canada reported that over 13% of the euthanasia of dogs were because of behavior problems, being aggression the most important cause (9%) (Gorodetsky 1997). In Spain most veterinarians estimated that at least 10 % of euthanasia in dogs and cats is caused by behavioral problems (Fatjó *et al.* 2006).

In Latin America there is little information about the frequent reasons of medical

consultation in dogs. In Colombia, the most frequent reasons of medical consultation in dogs were skin and digestive affections (Almansa *et al.* 2007; Villegas *et al.* 2010), while in Argentina, the most frequent affections were osteoarticulares and neoplasias (López *et al.* 2007). Especially in Uruguay, there is no information about it. Recently was reported that aggression is the most frequent behavioral problem of dogs in Montevideo (Damián *et al.* 2011). However, it is uncertain whether the behavior problems are common reasons for euthanasia of dogs in Uruguay.

The aim of this study was to know the most frequent reasons for medical consultation and euthanasia of dogs in Montevideo city through a survey of veterinary practitioners and the implications of behavioral problems.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A survey to veterinary practitioners from one hundred ($n = 100$) randomly sampled veterinary clinics was carried out in the city of Montevideo. There are approximately 300 veterinary clinics on this city. The survey was referred to last year events and was done between February and March of 2010. It consisted of the following four questions: a) What are the most frequent reasons for medical consultation about dogs in your clinic? b) What are the

most common reasons of euthanasia in your clinic? c) Has your clinic performed euthanasia for behavior problems?, and d) What proportion of dogs euthanased in your clinic are attributable to a behaviour problem? The frequency of medical consultation and euthanasia of dogs, as well as the proportion of veterinarians who have performed euthanasia for behavior problems were analyzed by Chi square, and was considered significantly with alpha at 5 %.

RESULTS

The most frequent reasons for medical consultation about dogs in veterinary practioners are consultations of skin affections, followed by digestive and respiratory affections, and less frequently infections, accidents (traffic accidents) and neoplasias ($X^2: 90.08$, gl: 8, $p < 0.0001$) (Figure 1).

The most frequent reasons for euthanasia of dogs were by elderly dog and neoplasias, followed by kidney affections, infections and accidents ($X^2: 47.24$, gl: 5, $p < 0.0001$) (Figure 2).

When veterinarians were asked whether their clinics had performed euthanasia for behavior problems, only 35% said yes ($X^2: 9$, gl: 1, $p = 0.0027$). Of those who performed euthanasia for behavior problems, only an average of 2% was due to behavior problems.

DISCUSSION

The most frequent reasons for medical consultation about dogs in veterinary practitioners in Montevideo were principally skin, digestive and respiratory affections. These results agree with other works carried out in Latin America (Almansa *et al.* 2007; Villegas *et al.* 2010).

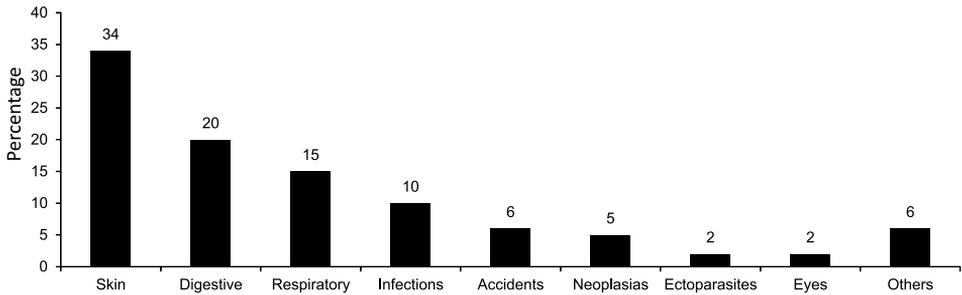


FIGURE 1. The most frequent reasons for medical consultation about dogs in veterinary practitioners in Montevideo

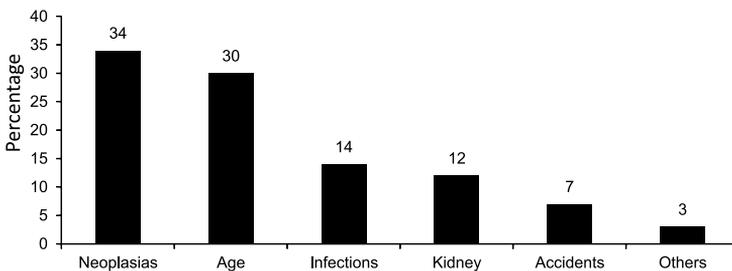


FIGURE 2. The most frequent reasons for euthanasia of dogs in veterinary practitioners in Montevideo

As was shown behavior problems ranked only 1% within the most frequent reasons for consulting veterinarians on dogs in Montevideo. The fact that canine behavior problems occupy low percentage of clinic visits may also be explained because the pet owners in our country may not have incorporated into their thinking that veterinarians can solve behavior problems (Damián *et al.* 2011). Given the high percentage of consultations on behavior problems in other countries (Campbell 1986; Lindell 2002; O'Farrell 1992), it is possible that canine behavior problems in Uruguay could be underestimated.

Our results of neoplasias and age as most common euthanasia reasons agree with other works about death in dogs. Neoplasias have been reported as the most frequent cause of death in dogs (Bonnett *et al.* 1997; Figuera *et al.* 2008; Moore *et al.* 2001). In other works it was shown that several reasons of death in dogs were associated with age (Bonnett *et al.* 2005; Eichelberg and Seine 1996). In a lower percentage, accidents were another reason of euthanasia in dogs in Montevideo, like Sweden (Bonnett *et al.* 1997; Bonnett *et al.* 2005) and Brasil (Trapp *et al.* 2010). Unlike our work, in Brasil Trapp *et al.* (2010) reported that the most frequent reasons for euthanasia or death in dogs were the infections or parasitic diseases, followed by traumas and neoplasias. They explain their results based on to the lack of vaccination programs and deworming. One of the reasons of euthanasia in Montevideo that has not been reported in high proportion in other countries is kidney affections. Unfortunately, depending on the data, it is difficult to explain the intermediate percentage of kidney affections as a cause of euthanasia in our country.

In Montevideo, a low percentage of dogs have been euthanized by clinicians because of behavior problems. Within them when they made euthanasia the same was performed at a very low percentage (2%). These results are much lower than those reported in other countries as USA (Overall 1997), Canada (Gorodetsky 1997), Spain (Fatjó *et al.* 2006) and Scotland (Stead 1982). As previously mentioned, we believe that canine behavior problems in our country could be underestimated perhaps because of the low level of consultation of owners of dogs to clinics for behavioral problems (Damián *et al.* 2011), and this could be associated with the low percentage of euthanasia for the same reason.

In conclusion, in Montevideo city the most frequent reasons for medical consultation about dogs in veterinary practitioners are skin, digestive and respiratory affections. The behavioral problems occupied only the 1% of the reasons for medical consultation in dogs. Within the most frequent reasons for euthanasia of dogs we found age, neoplasias, kidney affections, infections and accidents. Although euthanasia is carried out in our country for behavior problems, it is so in a very low percentage.

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