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Tubal Ligation—Alternative Sterilization Operation

by

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Recently, there has been much attention given towards the “pet animal” explosion. It has been reported that each hour approximately 10,000 dogs and cats are born in this country. A recent source states that this figure is exaggerated and is more like 3,500 per hour. Over 12 percent of the total dog and cat population must be destroyed annually to keep the burgeoning dog and cat population under control. Various means of animal population control have been proposed and are actively being carried out. Enforced licensing and leash laws, animal impoundment, euthanasia and spay clinics are frequently mentioned in lay and professional media and are understandably controversial subjects.

Next to euthanasia, surgical sterilization is the most common method of animal populations control. Ovariohysterectomy and castration are the standard means of sterilization. Some pet owners, however, have strong psychological resistance to this type of surgical alteration. They regard their pets as family members and are quite disturbed at “taking sex away.” These owners may eventually request pet sterilization but still loath the prospect at the loss of their pet’s sexuality.

The veterinary surgeon in contending with the pet animal explosion sometimes faces economic resistance by some owners. The veterinarian must face two opposite and divergent situations. He operates today with improved aseptic technique, utilizes inhalant and other less dangerous anesthetics and monitors the surgical patient more so than ever before. Better preoperative diagnostic tests and physical examinations are carried out and there is greater use of drugs and fluids during and following more difficult elective surgery. After all, the veterinary surgeon has more to “lose” performing an elective procedure on a seemingly normal patient. Since the veterinary surgeon attempts to emulate aseptic protocol and surgical safety measures accorded to human patients, the surgical cost must be commensurate with those efforts. Contrary to the desire by the surgeon to minimize surgical risk and postoperative complication are pleas by public interest groups and some pet

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owners for lower surgical fees. "Thus everyone could afford to have their pet animals spayed."

The veterinary surgeon has various alternatives for the client who has either psychological or economic resistance to an ovariohysterectomy or castration. An easy solution for some is to minimize the problem and continue to perform the high quality surgical service for the majority of pet owners. Or an individual could be a "schizo-surgeon," incorporating two or more surgical standards for similar surgical procedures. A third alternative would be to shorten the surgical time, maintain quality technique, permit the pet to be sexually intact and provide sterility.

Tubal ligation is an alternative procedure available to the veterinary surgeon. Tubal ligation with a little practice and proper instruments can be easily and rapidly performed. It appears to be especially appropriate for the client who presents a litter of cats, wants to deter the pet populations, but yet cannot "afford" the standard ovariohysterectomy procedure. Or for the pet owner who wants to prevent the pet from pregnancy but not at the expense of total loss of sexual capacity.

A short-acting barbiturate is suitable since operative time is minimal. A small skin incision is made on the midline at the umbilicus and extended caudally. A flank incision may also be suitable and permits rapid exposure to the ovaries. The suspensory ligament is divided to facilitate mobilization of the ovaries.

Small iris scissors and ophthalmic conjunctival forceps are used to grasp the ovarian bursa. With adequate lighting and translumination the fallopian tube is visualized within the wall of the ovarian bursa. Hemostatic metal clips are applied to the fallopian tube 1 cm. apart. A small segment of tube is removed between the clips. Simple transection of the tube would probably also be adequate. Routine abdominal wall closure may then be carried out.

The pet will still retain its sexuality which is either an advantage or disadvantage depending on the client's point of view. Admittedly, I have not performed tubal ligation on enough animals to study long-term effects. It would appear that the animal would have the same incidence of uterine and mammary disease comparable to those unsterilized animals which are not permitted to breed.

Vasectomies in male dogs are also uncomplicated procedures. Operative time, however, is not much different than simple castration. Metal hemostatic clips may also be used to ligate the vas deferens.

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