

ANESTHESIA-FREE DENTISTRY THE UGLY MONSTER REARS ITS HIDEOUS HEAD ONCE MORE

Some years ago, there was a lay-person who attempted to bring her “anesthesia free” dental (dis)services to Ontario. While she met with some early success, it seemed that the College of Veterinarians of Ontario (our regulatory body) was able to shut this down fairly quickly. While there have been businesses offering this in a number of other provinces and states, I was complacent, thinking that Ontario had dealt with this definitively. I was wrong and now need to wake up to the current reality and be pro-active in dealing with this. In fact, all of us who care about the oral health of companion animals need to be pro-active starting right now!

In the past few months, it has come to my attention that there are a couple of businesses offering anesthesia-free dental cleanings for dogs and cats. They seem to be based in the GTA and Barrie areas, but I am sure they will spread out if there is a demand. I just heard that they are planning a field trip to the Ottawa area. I will not mention the names of these businesses nor provide links to their sites as that would only increase their presence on the internet and raise their priority in search engines. For the same reason, I would ask that you try to minimize your visits to their sites.

It seems that they are mainly using pet stores as their bases of operation but may also have convinced some practitioners to allow them to operate within accredited veterinary facilities. Either way, this is completely inappropriate. For some background I would ask you to review the following documents.

Here is a position statement from the American Veterinary Dental College on the issue - http://avdc.org/Dental_Scaling_Without_Anesthesia.pdf. This statement is a few years old and is currently under review. The next version will likely be even more emphatic and may address the necessity for intra-oral dental radiographs as part of the minimum dental data-base.

Here is the link to the 2013 AAHA Dental Care Guidelines for Dogs and Cats, which address, among other things, the need for general

anesthesia to properly evaluate oral health and treat oral pathology in pet dogs and cats - http://www.toothvet.ca/PDFfiles/AAHA_Dental_Guidelines_2013.pdf.

Here is the CVO’s position statement on veterinary dentistry as adopted in Sept. of 2008 - http://www.toothvet.ca/PDFfiles/CVOs_position_on_dentistry.pdf. Particularly pertinent to the issue of Anesthesia Free Dentistry are these sections:

General

Veterinary dentistry requires both diagnosis and treatment. Only veterinarians may practice veterinary dentistry in Ontario. However, they can be assisted by an appropriately trained auxiliary under the direct supervision of a licensed veterinarian.

Veterinary dentistry includes provision of oral health care including but not limited to: the cleaning (other than simple brushing), adjustment, filing (“floating”), extraction, or repair of animals’ teeth; and to medical treatment of and surgery performed on any part of the oral cavity.

What this means is that anyone other than a licensed veterinarian, or someone working under the **direct supervision** of a licensed veterinarian who provides any dental “services” beyond simple tooth brushing is practicing veterinary medicine without a license, which is a Provincial offence and they are thus subject to prosecution under the Veterinarians Act of Ontario (http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_90v03_e.htm).

Anesthesia

The cleaning and scaling of the teeth of companion animals must be performed with general anesthesia with the use of an endotracheal tube with an inflated cuff in order to meet acceptable standards of practice for veterinarians in Ontario.

And what this means is that if anesthesia-free dentistry is done by or under the direct supervision of a licensed veterinarian, it is considered below the standard of care, i.e., malpractice.

So regardless of where it is done or who does it, in Ontario, anesthesia free dentistry is either illegal or malpractice! And yet, it continues to be offered by lay people who choose to operate outside of the law. The CVO is very much aware of this situation but investigating and prosecuting takes a lot of time and resources so while I would love to sit back and wait for the CVO to take care of this for us, I think the reality is that we all need to take an active role in counteracting this.

We are up against people who are capable of putting together really professional-looking and credible websites and marketing campaigns. They are quite convinced that what they are doing is a good thing and they have “all the answers” when pet owners ask questions. None of this changes the fact that the “services” they provide are inappropriate, potentially harmful and actually illegal. So what do we do about this?

Social media can be our ally here. Most of you have websites, many also have facebook pages and Twitter accounts. Let us use these resources to get the word out. Warn your clients about the dangers of anesthesia free dentistry. Make sure that they are informed regarding what constitutes proper dental care for pets. Give your clients resources that they can then share on their social media apps to further spread the word. Public education is the key here.

Here are some of the resources (in no particular order) that I have posted on my website (most are found on the Old CUSP Articles page at www.toothvet.ca). I would invite you to use and share these resources.

[AAHA Dental Guidelines 2013.pdf](#)

[CVOs position on dentistry.pdf](#)

My paper on the [CVO position.pdf](#)

[avdc.org/Dental_Scaling_Without_Anesthesia.pdf](#)

[A great short video](#)

[Why is Periodontal Disease Still So Common.pdf](#)

[Periodontal Disease is Hidden.pdf](#)

[You cannot prevent what has already happened.pdf](#)

[A description of proper veterinary dental care.pdf](#)

[My short blurb on Anesthesia-free.pdf](#)

[Focus on Micro Dogs.pdf](#)

[Importance of whole-mouth intra-oral dental rads.pdf](#)

And on my Facebook page
(www.facebook.com/toothvet).

[Another short video on pet dental care](#)

[A longer video on proper pet dental care](#)

[A shared posting on the importance of radiographs](#)

[A shared posting from some American colleagues](#)

[Vermont bans anesthesia free dentistry](#)

[From the Whole Dog Journal](#)

[My first Facebook post on this issue](#)

As well as launching a broad-based, grass-roots public awareness campaign, there is another absolutely crucial thing every practicing veterinarian in Ontario needs to do. If you are in any way involved in managing oral care issues in dogs and cats, you MUST ensure that the job you are doing with general anesthesia is demonstrably superior to the work done by the anesthesia-free crowd. General anesthesia does not make the dental procedure better, it allows it to be better. It is perfectly possible to do a thoroughly inadequate job with anesthetic if you are not taking intra-oral dental radiographs, not probing, exploring and charting above and below the gum line of every tooth and it makes little difference how clean you get the crowns if you leave deposits behind below the gum line.

So the three actions we need every clinic in Ontario to commit to right now are:

- 1) mount a client-awareness campaign regarding proper veterinary dental care.
- 2) adopt the 2013 AAHA Dental Care Guidelines for Dogs and Cats.
- 3) inform the CVO of the activities of the anesthesia-free groups in your area.

If we all do this, the Anesthesia Free groups will have no market to serve and will simply wander off in search of greener pastures.

