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A Happier, Healthier Pet

By Ginny Zuboy, RCHS Board Member

As a board member and active volunteer of the Randolph County Humane Society it has become clear that spaying and neutering our pets is the most effective way to save the lives and reducing the suffering of companion animals in our community and all over the world.

Some statistics:

- Nationwide, an estimated 67 million dogs and about 83 million cats are owned in the United States (Source: Pet Food Institute).
- Approximately 5 to 7 million companion animals enter animal shelters every year. Only 10% of the animals received by shelters have been spayed or neutered.
- Approximately 61% of all dogs and 75% of all cats entering shelters are euthanized (ASPCA 2010).
- For every human born, 7 puppies and kittens are born.
- One female cat and her offspring can produce 420,000 cats in 7 years. One female dog and her offspring can produce 67,000 puppies in 6 years.

Studies show that during the last 30 years shelter intakes and euthanasia have reduced significantly because of the tireless efforts of shelter employees, humane societies, charities, rescue organizations, veterinarians, volunteers, and responsible pet owners. Even so, these statistics speak for themselves. There are simply many more animals being born than there are good permanent homes.

What is Spay and Neuter? A “spay” or ovariectomy, is the surgical removal of a female animal’s ovaries and uterus, while “neutering”, or castration, is the removal of a male’s testicles. Spayed or neutered animals are unable to reproduce and they benefit from the procedures in many additional ways. They typically live much longer, healthier, and happier lives and are also helping to solve the serious problem of pet overpopulation.

Myths & Facts About Spaying and Neutering

Myth: It's better to have one litter before spaying a female pet.

Fact: Medical evidence indicates otherwise. Females spayed before their first heats are typically healthier. Many veterinarians now sterilize dogs and cats as young as eight weeks of age. Not only do younger animals better tolerate the surgery, but the sooner they are spayed, the sooner unwanted litters are prevented and the quicker the health benefits will begin.

Myth: I want my children to experience the miracle of birth.

Fact: Bad idea! The miracle of birth is overshadowed by the thousands of animals euthanized all across the country. Whelping is unpredictable and witnessing the birth of puppies or kittens could be a traumatic experience for a child. It is a messy business and sometimes fraught with stress and discomfort of the mother and birth complications. Check out a book or video from the library, and teach children that all life is precious by spaying and neutering your pets.

Myth: But my pet is purebred.

Fact: So is at least one out of every four pets brought to animal shelters around the country.

Myth: But my dog (or cat) is so special, I want a puppy (or kitten) just like her.

Fact: Your pet's puppies or kittens have an unlikely chance of being a carbon copy of your pet.

Myth: I don't want my male dog or cat to feel less of a male; my female's emotional state will be harmed if she doesn't experience her first heat cycle.

Fact: Pets do not have any concept of sexual identity or ego. Neutering or spaying will not change a pet's basic personality. S/he does not suffer any kind of emotional reaction or identity crisis when altered.

Myth: My pet will get fat and lazy.

Fact: Only if you let it. Most pets get fat and lazy, not because of metabolic changes, but because their owners feed them too much and don't give them enough exercise.

Myth: I want my dog to be protective. Neutering may negatively change my male's personality.

Fact: It is a dog's natural instinct to protect home and family. A dog's personality is formed more by genetics and environment than by sex hormones. When behaviors relating to hormonal urges and mating urges are eliminated, neutered dogs often display more affection for their owners, as they are no longer interested in wandering in the search of and fighting for females in heat.

Myth: I can keep my male from roaming and my in-season female away from males without putting them through surgery.

Fact: Think again. Males and females alike become obsessed with mating when the female is in season, and will persist in all sorts of ways to get together, even over and through fences. Intact male dogs and cats can travel miles if they sense a female in heat. Male dogs have jumped through windows, screen doors and over fences to get to females in heat. Intact male dogs and cats are more often injured or killed by cars at a young age, due to their drive to find females in heat.

Myth: I'll find good homes for all the puppies and kittens.

Fact: You may find them homes, but you are still contributing to the homeless and euthanasia problem by bringing more animals into the world to compete for homes. You can only control what decisions you make with your own pet. Your pet's puppies and kittens, or their puppies or kittens, could end up in an animal shelter, adding to the homeless population.

Myth: It's expensive to have my pet spayed or neutered.

Fact: The cost of spaying or neutering a pet is much less than the cost of raising puppies or kittens for a year, and certainly less than the possible cost of medical bills due to the consequences of not spaying or neutering your pet.

Myth: If my pet has puppies or kittens, I can sell them and make money.

Fact: If you are a responsible pet owner and the litter is properly immunized, fed, and cared for, you would be lucky to break even and that is assuming you could sell them.

More Facts

Reproductive Statistics:

- The first heat cycle in cats and dogs is at approximately 7 – 8 months of age.
- Female dogs come into heat 2-3 times a year.
- A female dog is in heat for approximately 3 weeks.
- Female cats come into heat at irregular intervals, usually more often during the spring and summer.
- Female cats may not go out of heat until they are bred.
- Dogs and cats are pregnant for approximately 63 days.
- Cats can get pregnant while nursing.
- Intact males and females in the same house will breed even if they are brother and sister or father and daughter.

Benefits of Spaying Female Dogs and Cats:

- Reduced chance of mammary cancer in female dogs. Spaying a female dog prior to the first heat cycle reduces the risk of mammary cancer by nearly 100%. Female

dogs allowed to experience just two heat cycles before being spayed have a 25% greater chance of developing mammary cancer.

- Eliminates the risk of uterine infections. Senior intact females are at great risk for developing fatal bacterial uterine infections that require emergency surgery for treatment.
- Eliminates the risk of ovarian and uterine cancer. When a female is spayed, both ovaries and the entire uterus are removed.
- Eliminates heat cycles and the undesirable elements of the heat cycle such as bleeding, crying, and nervous behaviors. Female cats have a tendency to stay in heat until they are bred by male cats. A lengthy heat cycle in a cat can lead to anemia, lethargy and other health issues. Dogs come into heat every 6 months, stay in heat for an average of 3 weeks, and can have a bloody discharge for 1 to 2 weeks. Cats can come into heat even while nursing, and have 3 or more litters a year.

Benefits of Neutering Male Dogs and Cats:

- Reduces the risk of prostate disease. Neutering greatly decreases the chance of prostate enlargement. Prostate enlargement is often related to testosterone and is a common problem of older intact dogs. The enlarged prostate can interfere or prevent urination and require emergency catheterization and castration. Neutering also reduces the risk of prostate cancer.
- Eliminates the risk of testicular cancer. Reduces the chance of hernia. As intact males age, the testosterone weakens the muscles around the colon and can result in a

hernia of the colon that prevents defecation and results in stool building up in large blockages in the colon. Decreases spraying. Neutering male cats at a young age will decrease their tendency to spray and mark territory.

- Decreases unwanted and aggressive behavior. Neutering can help increase a pet's attention span and focus, making a pet more responsive to training. Decreased hormone levels can also result in decreased aggression and other behavior problems.

According to Theresa Bruner, VP of the Federation of Humane Organizations (FOHO) and Executive Director of FOHO WV LA, INC., the 2010 US Census indicates West Virginia has 748,517 households; 67% of WV households own pets.

A 2009 survey shows that 54% of all animals entering WV shelters are euthanized because there are not enough homes for them. Some counties have rates as high as 70%.

The Randolph County Humane Society has one of the highest adoption rates in the state. We are fortunate that Kelly Scheidegger, RCHS shelter manager, has established long standing and trusting relationships with various rescue programs and sanctuaries in the eastern part of the country, which has allowed many of our animals to be transported to other states where communities have successful spay and neuter programs and loving families waiting to adopt them. These programs are quite competitive and it is due to Kelly's dedication to these programs and her ability to provide consistent and reliable services that we are able to enjoy a higher than normal adoption rate. This life-line has been

critical to RCHS operations. My fellow board members and RCHS volunteers applaud Kelly's hard work and the great success of these programs.

Spaying and neutering our pets is the only solution to the problem of abandoned, homeless animals and the ugly fact of euthanasia. The Randolph County Humane Society advocates for the spaying and neutering of all pets and all RCHS adopted pets are altered before they leave the shelter.

If you have not yet spayed or neutered your pets, join the movement and become part of the solution. Call your veterinarian and make that appointment. Your four-footed companions will thank you by living safer, longer, healthier, and happier lives.