

University Spay Neuter Programs

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Recent History in Surgical Instruction

University Teaching Hospitals have
become tertiary care centers

With a resultant decrease in routine
caseloads

With a resultant decrease in spay /
neuter surgery

Decreasing hands on spay / neuter experience

Typically veterinary students have graduated having performed as few as 1 to 5 spay / neuter surgeries

Typically veterinary students have graduated having never performed pediatric surgery

Recent History in Surgical Instruction

University Teaching labs have moved more and more towards spay / neuter, BUT...

Surgical instructors recognize that students just starting their surgery labs have had little or no prior surgical experience

So, they teach spay / neuter techniques designed to compensate for lack of knowledge / skill

- Long incisions with extensive abdominal exposure

- Double ligating everything

- Simple interrupted abdominal closures

In many programs, no one ever comes back to the students once they gain experience to teach more efficient techniques

In many programs, the students never reach a point where they have enough experience to use more efficient techniques

To Increase Student

Experience

A few universities developed cooperative programs with animal shelters

In 2010 PETSMAART Charities created a grant category to fund innovative programs

The PETSMAART Charities program has assisted many more colleges to develop shelter programs involving spay / neuter

PETSMAART Charities

Program

Grants ranging from \$20,000 to \$250,000 for start-up and operational costs

Considers it win-win-win-win

Students gain surgical experience

Profession gains new veterinarians more prepared with efficient surgical skills

Communities gain veterinarians ready to sterilize kittens and puppies, thereby reducing pet overpopulation

The Colleges gain funds to support their surgical training programs

University Programs /

Models

Shelter animals brought to
university facilities for spay /
neuter (+ or – routine care)

Students taken to shelters to
perform spay / neuter (+ or –
routine care)

Using shelter's facilities

Mobile units taken to shelters

Student rotations in animal shelters
to perform spay / neuter (+ or –
routine care)

Advantages of These Programs

Gives students more surgical experience (universities report students averaging between 20 and 75 surgeries each)

Gives students experience with pediatric spay / neuter

Makes students more aware of pet overpopulation

Makes students more aware of issues animal shelters face

Keys to Success

For students to gain the most surgical experience

It's best if the program is not under the control of the surgical service

or anesthesia service
Students should be taught, and
allowed to perform, efficient high
volume spay / neuter techniques
Students should perform the
surgeries and receive “immediate”
feedback on surgical performance

Challenges

Funding - many university programs
are totally dependent on grants
and donations

Private Veterinarians – there are
still some veterinarians who
consider these programs “unfair
competition.”

Emergency complications –
arrangements must be made to
handle post-operative
complications

Rewards

Students love these programs –
gives them considerable hands
on experience

Shelters love these programs –
especially the ones that offer
services for low or no cost

Increases adoption rates at
participating shelters

Decreases intake / euthanasia rates
at participating shelters

Takes pressure off local
veterinarians to perform low cost
/ no cost spay / neuter

Results

Graduates understand the
problems animal shelters face

Graduates have greater
understanding of pet
overpopulation

Graduates have improved surgical
skills

Graduates have experience in
pediatric spay / neuter

Graduates are more likely to
consider spay / neuter or shelter

work as a career option

The Future

All Universities should have shelter
spay / neuter programs

Universities need to recognize the
importance of such programs and
adequately fund them

It should no longer be acceptable
for veterinary students to
graduate

having performed only 2 or 3
surgeries

without fully understanding efficient
spay / neuter techniques

without pediatric spay / neuter

experience