

Non-Surgical Methods of Sterilization for Pet Population Control

By Brenda Griffin, DVM

For over 30 years, researchers have been studying methods to control reproduction. Tremendous advances have been made in recent years with many successes in the human and wildlife fields. During this time, a few scientists have been working to apply these technologies to dogs and cats. Recently, an effort was made to bring these scientists together for the purpose of encouraging collaboration and sharing of ideas, methods and strategies in order to expedite the development of contraceptive drugs and vaccines specifically for cats and dogs. To this end, the Alliance for Contraception in Cats and Dogs (ACCD) was formed in August 2000.

The first goal of the Alliance was to sponsor an international meeting to facilitate interaction of interested individuals and to encourage exchange of ideas and research results. The First International Symposium on Non-Surgical Contraceptive Methods for Pet Population Control was held in April 2002 in Pine Mountain, Georgia. Approximately 100 persons representing 11 countries were in attendance. Speakers presented the latest data and information on new contraceptive drugs and vaccines currently under development, and discussed FDA regulation of companion animal contraceptive products, and the role of the pharmaceutical industry in development and commercialization of such products.



Keynote speakers addressed the dynamics and demographics of animal population control.

Contraceptive drugs and vaccines work by exerting a targeted pharmacological effect or prompting an immune response that inhibits or blocks some component of the animal's reproductive system, resulting in infertility.

These products will greatly facilitate sterilization of dogs and cats since they will not require the commitments of technical expertise, equipment and time that surgical sterilization requires. The ideal contraceptive product would rapidly induce permanent sterilization, eliminate breeding behavior as well as fertility, provide the same health benefits as surgical sterilization, while requiring only a single dose. Furthermore, the ideal product would be effective in dogs and cats of both sexes and all ages, and be safe and easy to administer. At this time, no single product is able to fulfill all of these criteria; however, several promising products are under development. Even if the ideal formulation cannot be produced, safe products that induce sterility in dogs or cats, male or female, will be valuable tools in the fight against pet overpopulation.

Thorough investigation of products is time-consuming and expensive and requires substantial investment not only from the scientists, but also from pharmaceutical companies and investors. The exciting news is

that products are realistically expected to be available within the next decade, with at least one product to be released in 2003. Data and information on contraceptive products currently under development will be shared during this lecture. For more information, visit the ACCD web site at www.vetmed.vt.edu/accd.

Non-surgical methods of sterilization will be safe, effective alternatives to surgical sterilization that can be used to increase the

number of dogs and cats sterilized. It is of paramount importance that these products be accepted by veterinarians and by the public in order for them to have a far-reaching impact. The scientists, pharmaceutical companies and funding agencies behind these products are to be applauded.

Brenda Griffin, DVM, MS, DACVIM, is affiliated with the Scott-Ritchey Research Center, College of Veterinary Medicine, Auburn University, Alabama.