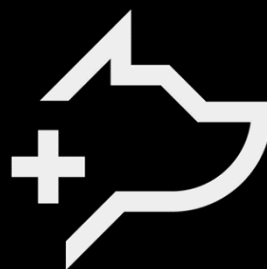




The benefits and costs of pet ownership for individuals experiencing homelessness

Gabriel Galea BSc(Hons) BVSc PhD MRCVS FHEA

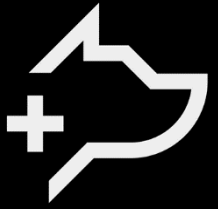


STREETVET

ACCESSIBLE, FREE VET CARE
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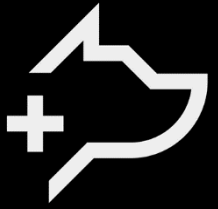
Seminar objectives



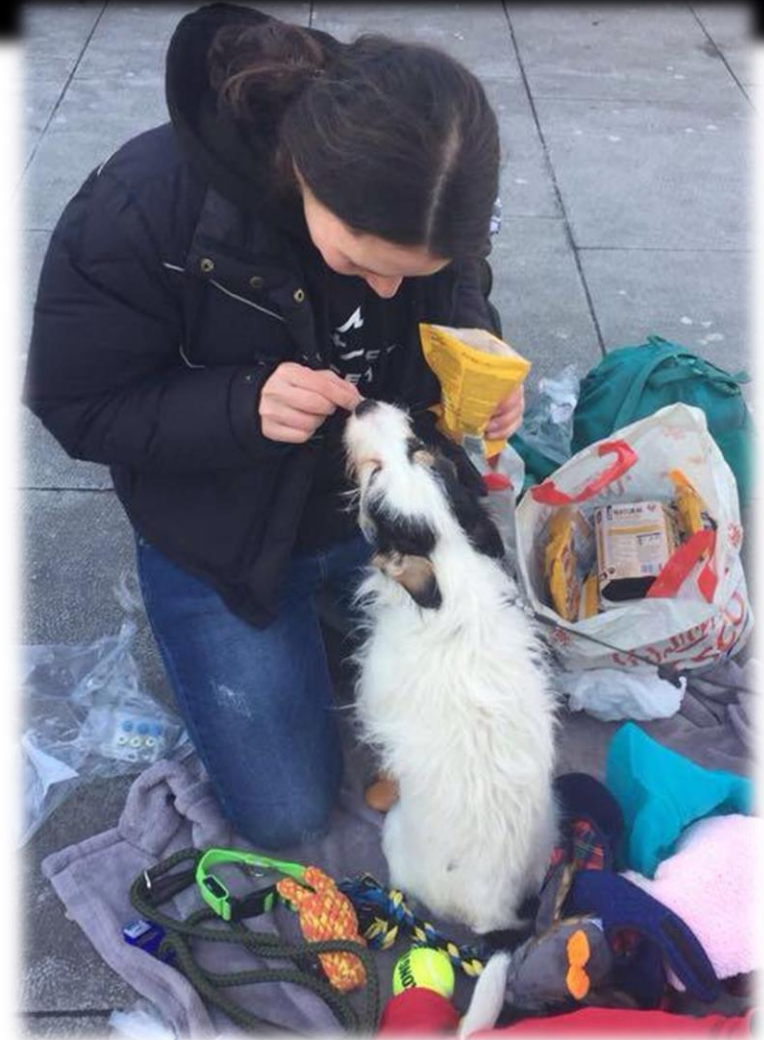
- Recognise the costs and benefits of pet ownership for individuals experiencing homelessness
- Understand the requirement for positive pet policies to achieve engagement
- Be aware of the potential contributions of veterinary professionals to the inclusion medicine allied health team



Caring for a pet on the streets is costly

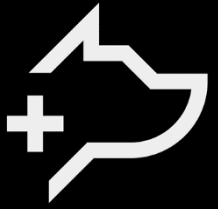


- Reduced mobility
- Provision of daily essentials
- Stigma (“This is for him, not for you”)
- Zoonotic disease exposure
- Bereavement triggers coping mechanisms
- Exclusion from hospitals and housing



Howe & Easterbrook, J Pov, 2018: Rhoades et al, Child Psych Hum Dev, 2015:
Cronley et al, Psych Rep, 2009: Kidd & Kidd, Psychol Rep, 1994

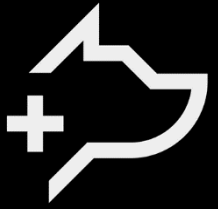
Homeless pet owners face exacerbated housing challenges



- Most social housing is not pet friendly so owners get “stuck” if accepted in hostels
- Hostel staff not trained to handle dogs – staff and residents are prejudiced
- Typically, owners abandon dogs to take a hostel
- Insisting on keeping the dog seen as a “choice” and makes the owner “voluntarily homeless”

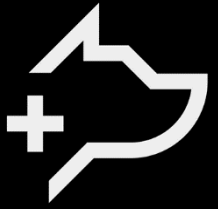
IT'S NO CHOICE AT ALL!

Homeless pet owners often struggle to access healthcare for themselves



- Often will not seek medical care until pathology is more advanced
- Likely to arrive at A&E with their best friend
- Will self-discharge if cannot entrust anyone with their dog
- More likely to be discharged back onto the streets (lack of pet-friendly accommodation)
- Medical staff often unaware of zoonoses

So why do people do it?



- Companionship
- Interaction
- Security
- Purpose/“Redemption”
- Often a link to happier times...



Rew, J Child Adolesc Psychiatr Nurs, 2000

Irvine L, J Contemp Ethnogr, 2012; Brooks et al, BMC Psych, 2018

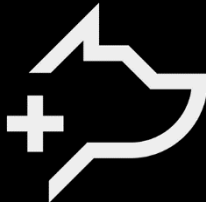


Table 1 Dimensions of pet ownership among homeless youth utilizing drop-in centers in Los Angeles (N = 332)

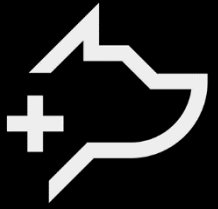
Dimension	% Agreeing
My pet keeps me company	84.48
My pet makes me feel loved	79.31
My pet helps me feel safe	72.88
My pet gives me someone to love	70.69
My pet protects me	64.20

US experience
Youths
Already using drop-in centres

Table 2 Demographic and behavioral characteristics of homeless youth utilizing drop-in centers in Los Angeles, by pet ownership (N = 332)

	% (N)/Mean (SD)			χ^2/t (p)
	Overall	Pet Owners	Non-Pet Owners	
Housing	48.78 (160)	36.49 (27)	52.36 (133)	5.78 (0.02)
Where currently staying				
Street	49.10 (163)	50.00 (38)	48.83 (125)	8.7 (0.01)
Shelter/housing program	13.86 (46)	3.95 (3)	16.80 (42)	
Other housing location	37.05 (123)	46.1 (35)	34.8 (89)	

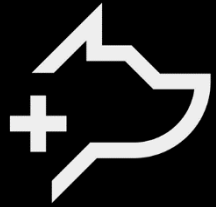
It is hard to get pet food	10.52
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Where do the dogs come from?

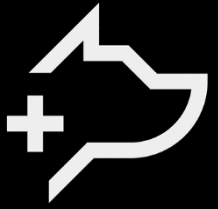
- *Used to be owner's deceased son's dog.*
- *Bought when owner felt things were going well.*
- *All that is left of owner's dairy farm.*
- *Fished out of the canal in a plastic bag.*
- *Squat dog.*
- *Paid £12 for him.*

Seminar objectives



- Recognise the costs and benefits of pet ownership for individuals experiencing homelessness
- Understand the requirement for positive pet policies to promote engagement
- Be aware of the potential contributions of veterinary professionals to the inclusion medicine allied health team



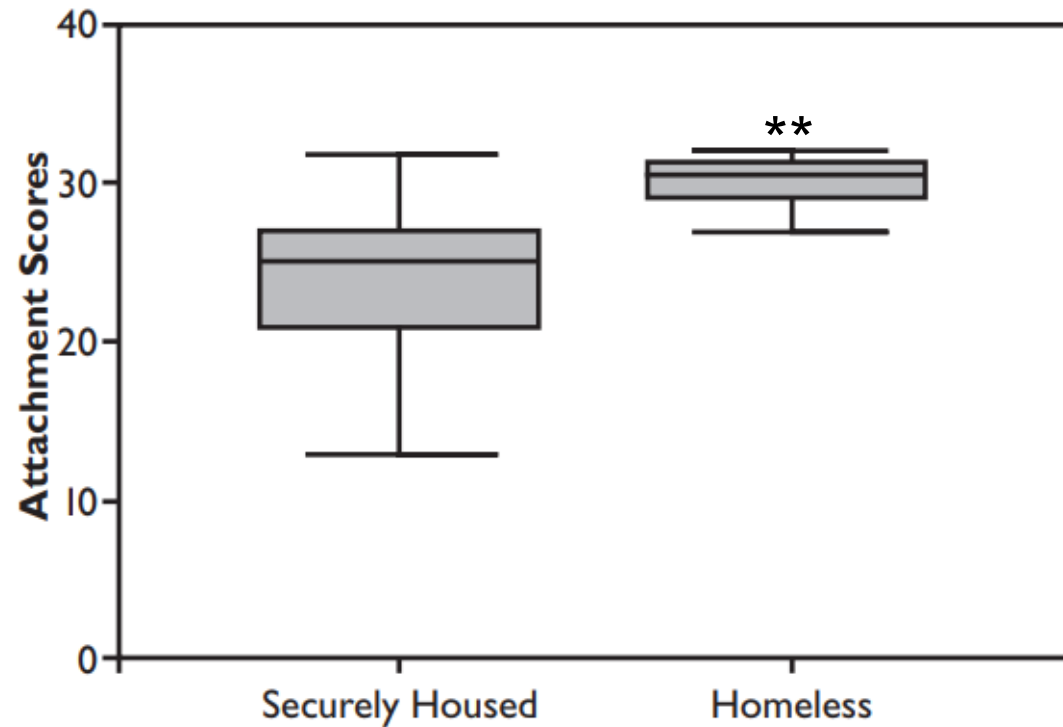
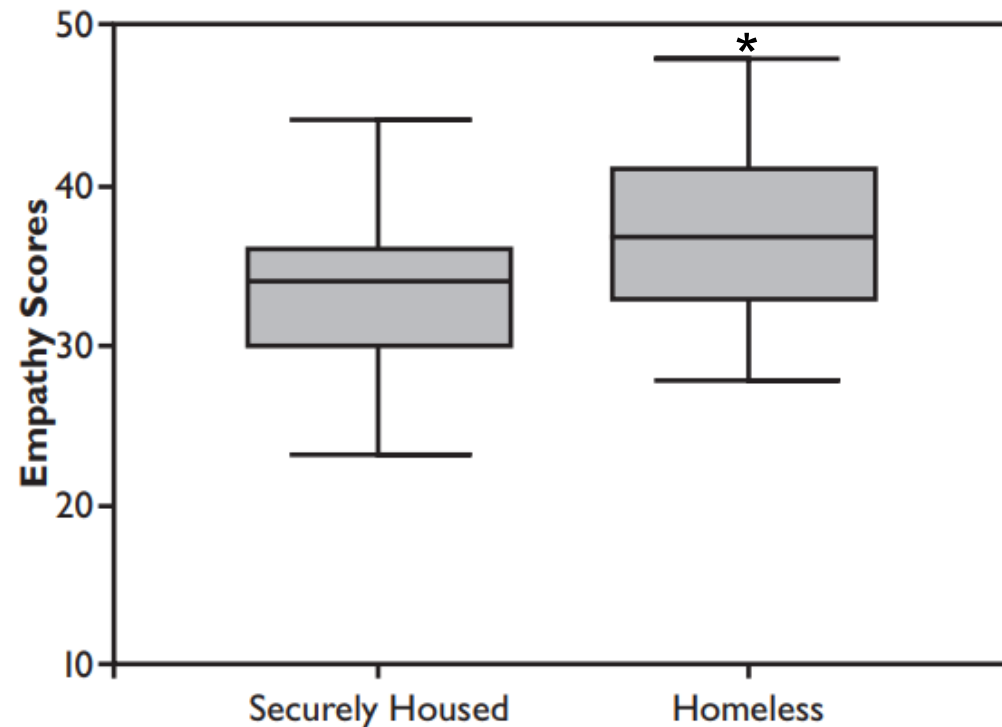
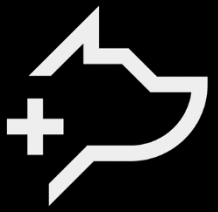


““You’re homeless. You don’t deserve a dog.”” [We laugh]

So how do you respond?

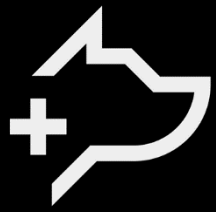
“With a big ‘FU’! I’ve had people say, ‘I’m calling Animal Control and having your dog taken away from you’ and I’m like ‘Yeah, yeah. Whatever.’ Because Animal Control’s going to come and see a **healthy, happy dog** and be like, ‘You have a nice day.’”

Homeless pet owners are often particularly bonded to their dogs



Taylor et al, Anthrozoös, 2004

Also see Singer et al, Phys Rep, 1996

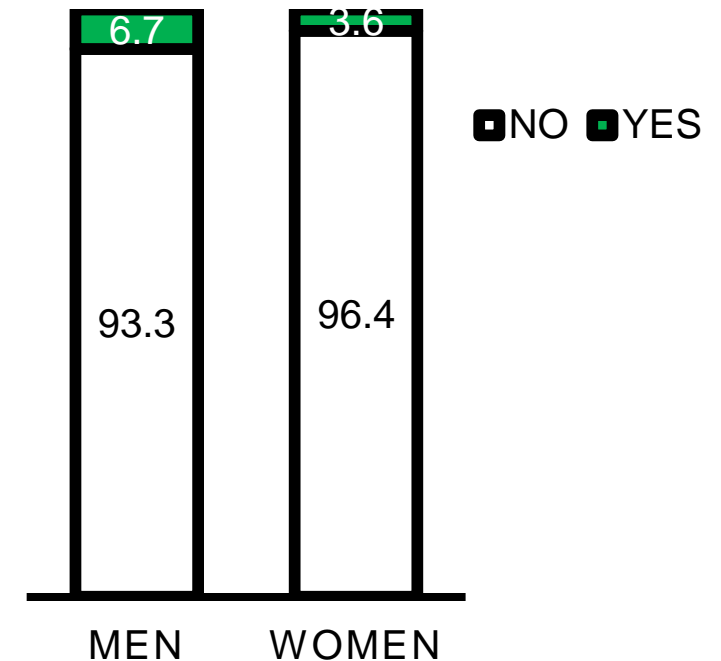


The Lexington Attachment to Pets Scale

- “My pet means more to me than *any* of my friends”
- “I believe that pets should have the same rights and privileges as family members”
- “Quite often, my feelings towards people are affected by the way they react to my pet”
- “I believe that loving my pet helps me stay healthy”

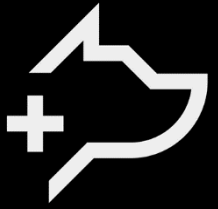
Johnson et al, Anthrozoös, 2015

**WOULD YOU ACCEPT
HOUSING IF IT DID NOT
ALLOW PETS?**



Singer et al, Psychological Reports, 1995

Pets provide motivation and engagement



- Lack of trust fundamentally impairs access to services
- Outreach and social work professionals commonly do not value pet ownership
- Pets provide a conversation starter!
- Bonded owners are motivated by ensuring their pet's welfare



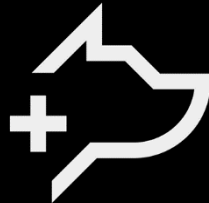
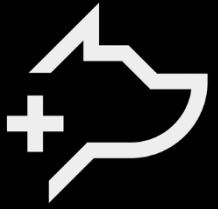


Table 2 Demographic and behavioral characteristics of homeless youth utilizing drop-in centers in Los Angeles, by pet ownership (N = 332)

	% (N)/Mean (SD)			χ^2/t (p)
	Overall	Pet Owners	Non-Pet Owners	
<i>Mental health</i>				
PTSD symptoms	23.75 (76)	24.32 (18)	23.58 (58)	0.02 (0.90)
Depression scale (0–30)	9.61 (0.44)	7.78 (0.85)	10.16 (0.50)	2.34 (0.02) ←
Loneliness scale (0–6)	2.19 (1.89)	1.77 (1.81)	2.32 (1.90)	2.13 (0.03) ←
<i>Trauma & violence</i>				
Hit at home	45.85 (149)	49.33 (37)	44.80 (112)	0.48 (0.49)
Hit at home and currently staying at home	42.42 (14)	58.33 (7)	33.33 (7)	1.95 (0.16)
Saw family member hit at home	41.23 (134)	46.67 (35)	39.60 (99)	1.19 (0.28)
Saw family member hit at home and currently staying at home	33.33 (11)	50.00 (6)	23.81 (5)	2.36 (0.125)
Carried a weapon (past 30 days)	37.76 (125)	47.37 (36)	34.90 (89)	3.87 (0.05) ←
Hurt seriously in a fight (past year)	54.98 (182)	55.26 (42)	54.90 (140)	0.003 (0.97)
Hurt badly or threatened while homeless	33.12 (106)	31.08 (23)	33.74 (83)	0.18 (0.67)

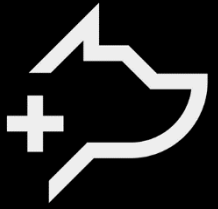
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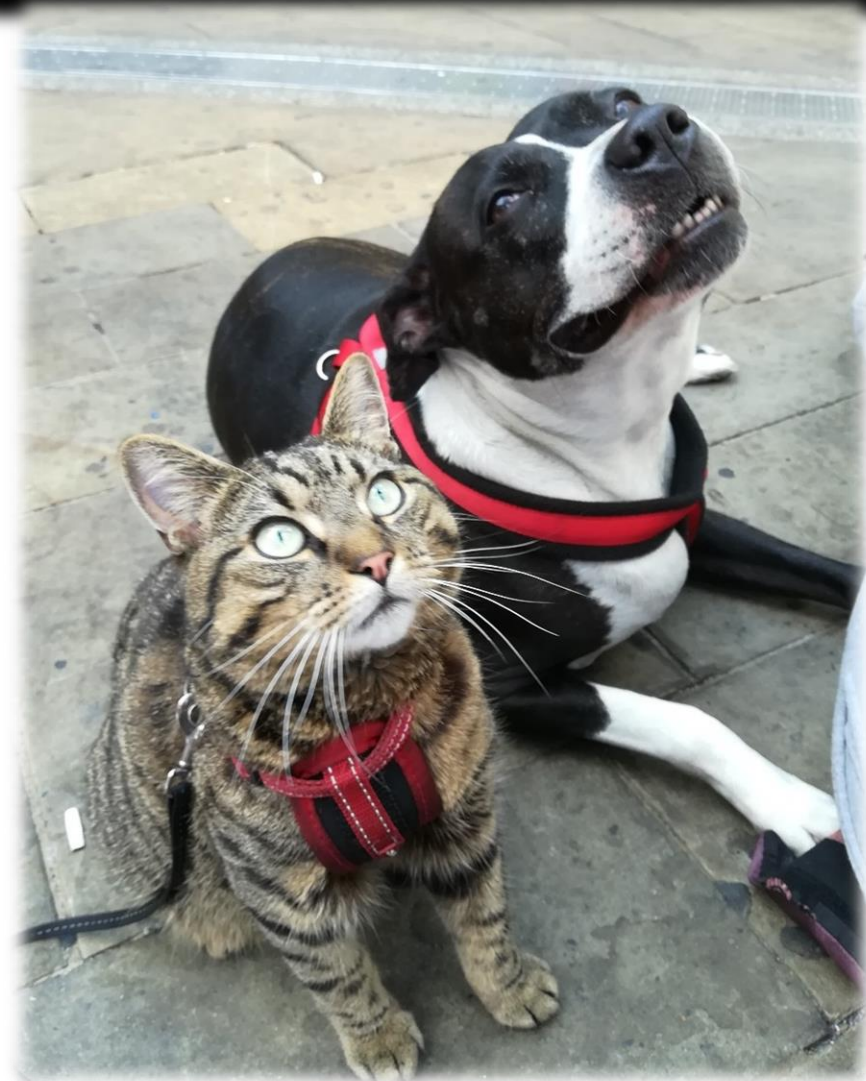


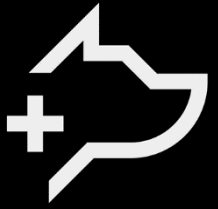
Homeless pet owner usually manage to provide for their pets' needs admirably



- Comparable health status to dogs owned by people in houses
- Less likely to be obese
- Less likely to suffer from separation anxiety (not left alone...)
- Non-evidence based statements to the contrary unnecessarily perpetuate stigma

Need preventative veterinary healthcare
and a safety net in an emergency

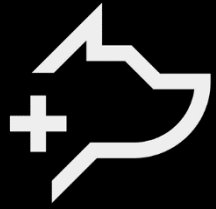




StreetVet-facilitated solutions

- Pet references for housing applications certifying date of last parasiticide and vaccination administered
- Advocacy and empowerment
- Provision of emergency kennels: must have a contract in place, rarely able to foster
- Pet-friendly policy guidance
- Monitoring of potential zoonoses
- Support in bereavement



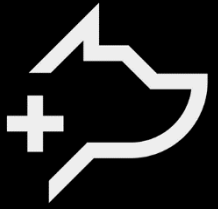


StreetVetting poses unique challenges

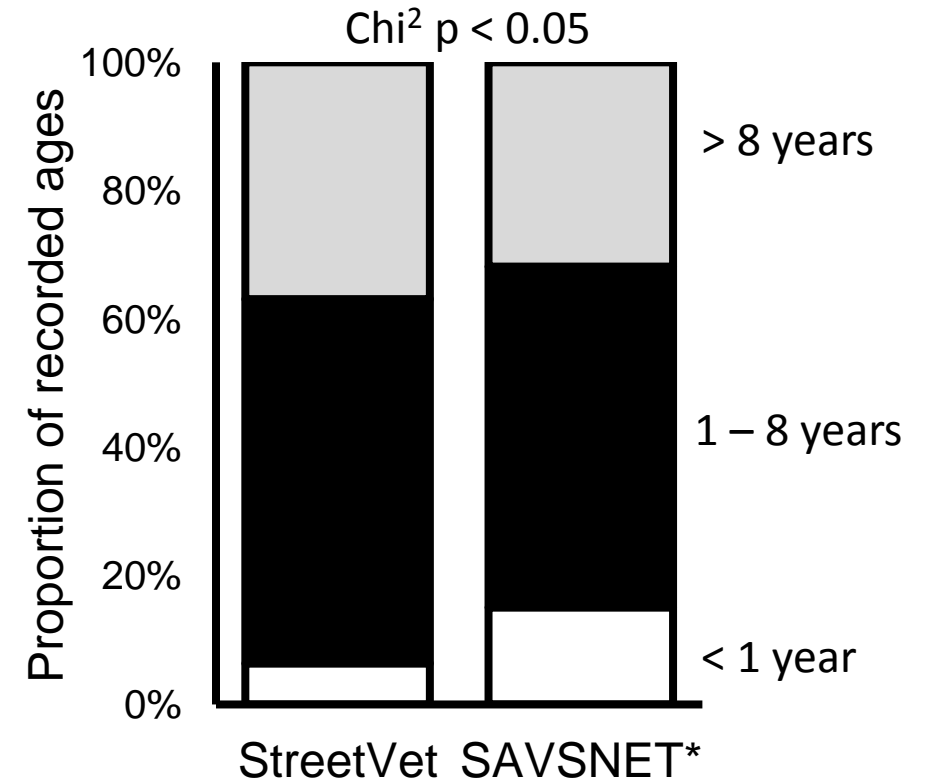


- Incredibly bonded owners
- Must safeguard potentially vulnerable owners
- Difficult “practice” environment
- Different medical and social priorities
- Atypical medical cases and risk factors

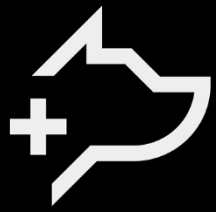
Unique medical cases and risk factors



- Very varied diet
- Typically older dogs
- “Diseases of the Staffie”
- Often fragmented histories
- “Ingenious” home remedies
- Always aware of NAI, don’t think we have ever seen it



*Sánchez-Vizcaíno et al, BMC Vet Res, 2017

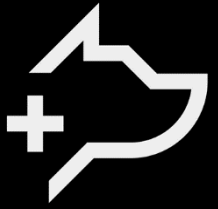


Treatment priorities and limitations

- A bit of diarrhoea is a big problem in a small hostel room
- Cannot prescribe “chicken and rice”
- Cannot “crate rest”
- No fridge...
- Some get weekly checks, others will never be seen again
- Avoid using topical treatments



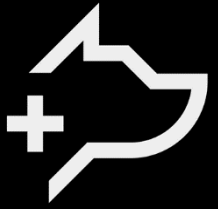
Case example



- 13 year old terrier presented with dorsal alopecia and pigmentation
- Asymmetrical testicles identified. Pre-GA investigations started:
 - In field HCT and glucose measurement
 - Urinalysis (SG and dipstick)
 - Blood-sampled for in-house analysis
- Castrated and submitted for histopath – diagnosed Leydig cell tumour.
- Alopecia resolved within 3 months.



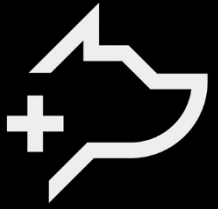
Case example



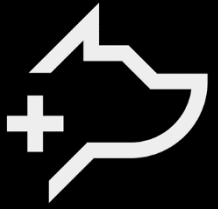
- Long-term patient treated for minor dermatological complaints.
- Run-over by a train.
Rescued from the tracks by the RSPCA and transferred back to our care
- Amputation, enucleation and prolonged hospitalisation in a practice.
- Magical recovery, reunited with her owner.
- Mast cell tumour diagnosed, staged and removed.

“Common” zoonoses

- Fleas
- Sarcoptes
- Dermatophytoses
- Giardia/Salmonella
- (Toxocara)
- (Monitoring exotic diseases)
- (Dog bites)



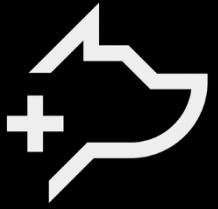
Advice for allied health professionals working around dogs



- Never sandwich the dog between you and the owner/anything else
- Do not initiate interactions with the dog yourself
- Be aware of canine body language
- Dogs nearly always bite out of fear (inc. guarding), sometimes as a learnt behaviours



Muzzle training



- Forcing a muzzle on is likely to create aversion and cause problems when none exist
- Must be able to pant and drink in muzzle
- Two straps for security – one around neck, second over head
- Appropriate to face shape – flat-faced breeds will get out of a long muzzle

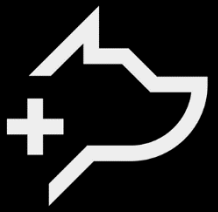




Lots of videos on YouTube

Key principles =

- Positive reinforcement
- Won't learn if stressed



Dog risk assessment questionnaire

Email info@streetvet.co.uk for a copy	Owner's response
How long have you had your pet for?	
Has your pet ever bitten you or another person?	
Has your pet ever bitten another dog?	
Is your pet protective of food, toys, you, your possessions, or anything else (please specify)?	
Is your pet receiving any medical treatment, or are you aware of any conditions which may require veterinary treatment?	
Do you think your dog needs to be muzzled around people it does not know and other dogs?	
Has your control of your dog ever been a factor in any Anti-Social Behaviour Order or has it even been confiscated by the police?	
Does your dog get distressed if left for short periods of time?	
Is your dog known to be destructive?	
When was the last time your dog was treated for fleas and what was the product used?	

New pet = unknown



Yes = risk minimisation and isolation

Pain = fear. Treatments may make the dog more likely to soil inside, for example.

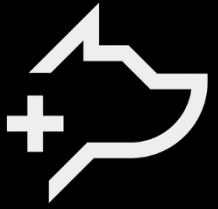
May indicate inconsistent control – NOT ALWAYS!



Potential nuisance behaviours

NOT a pet-shop product – MUST be veterinary!

Thank you!



STREETVET

info@streetvet.co.uk

Co-founders:

Dr Jade Statt MRCVS CertSAM

Dr Sam Joseph MRCVS

