From the Clinician’s Desk: Beginnings and Endings...

Hard to believe, but our first class of Shelter Medicine Interns complete their year of specialized training this month! As Drs. Kathleen Riley and Michael Greenberg cross the finish line, they will be tagging our new interns, Drs. Kate Gollon and Nicole Putney, into action. I am excited to introduce the new members of our Shelter Medicine Team.

Dr. Kate Gollon graduated from Cornell Veterinary College this Spring, and comes to our program with a particular interest in TNR programs, high quality/high volume spay neuter, and community outreach. As an undergraduate education major at Boston College, she focused on community advocacy, and became interested in animal welfare and social change. After college, she served as a disaster relief volunteer during Hurricane Katrina, and then became involved in shelter and animal rescue programs. As a veterinary student, she externed at the ASPCA, Best Friends Animal Sanctuary, and Lollypop Farm. She also founded a TNR project in a community outside of Ithaca. She is passionately committed to the welfare of free-roaming and feral cats, to community education, and to harnessing the power of people to make a difference in the lives of animals.

Dr. Nicole Putney comes to us from the West Coast, having recently graduated from Washington State University. A founding member of WSU’s Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association student chapter, she worked as a student to create more humane college policies for the use of animals in teaching laboratories. Her special interests include companion animal behavior, dermatology, and pathology, as well as field medicine. She has been a frequent volunteer for HSVMA’s Rural Area Veterinary Services, and is committed to community outreach, compassionate care, and client education. As a veterinary student, she externed at Oregon Humane Society, the Washington Animal Disease and Diagnostic Lab, and several small animal practices. Nicole truly enjoys working with communities, shelters and pet owners. She is a talented public speaker and educator with a passion for community service.

I am thrilled to have these professionals join our ranks – both here at Cornell, and in the broader shelter medicine community.

Be seeing you at the shelter . . .

Elizabeth Berliner, DVM, MA

A Head Start for Pit-Bulls in Tacoma: Dr. Mike Greenberg

Several years ago, the volunteer members of Bullseye Pit-Bull Rescue in Tacoma, Washington set out to provide services and education to low-income pit-bull owners. Thus the Responsi-Bull program was born, the pillars of which are spay-neuter, owner education, and dog training. By partnering with other local agencies, Responsi-Bull draws upon the services and expertise of the community with the goal of reducing pit-bull euthanasia and

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A Head Start for Pit-Bulls: (continued from Page 1)
restoring the image of this breed mix.

The program consists of three steps. The first, Fix-a-Pit, provides free spay-neuter services to income-qualified owners. Surgeries are subsidized by grants and performed at Coalition: HUMAnE, a Humane Alliance-model spay-neuter clinic. Pit-Ed, the second step in the program, is a workshop that provides owner education. In addition to covering basic husbandry, owners learn about the breed’s history, breed-specific legislation, and how they can partner with their dogs to educate the public about pit-bulls. The workshop is given through Pawsitive Alliance, an organization that partners with other groups in Washington to increase adoptions, support spay-neuter efforts, and improve pet retention. Upon completion of Pit-Ed, owners and their dogs are able to participate in the third aspect, Train-a-Pit. This four-week obedience class is taught by Positive Approach Dog Training, a large, for-profit dog training center in Tacoma. The class focuses on teaching owners how to use positive-reward-based methods to teach their dogs, and how to better understand dog behavior.

At this point, the Responsi-Bull program is supported entirely through grants from both local and national funding agencies. Income qualifying participants are required to provide a $50 deposit at the start of the program. This deposit is refunded in $10 increments at each of the five sessions comprising the Pit-Ed and Train-a-Pit portions of the program; thus the program is ultimately free if all sessions are attended.

Although no data are available yet regarding the effects of Responsi-Bull on euthanasia rates and dog retention, members of humane organizations feel the program has been a success. Notably, while Tacoma does not have breed-specific legislation, there are shelters in the area that have historically not adopted out pit-bull mixes but are doing so now, contingent upon adopters taking part in the program.

For more information, visit:

www.bullseyerescue.org
www.coalitionhumane.org
www.pawsitivealliance.org
www.positiveapproachdogtraining.com

Improving GI Parasite Detection: Dr. Kate Riley

Gastrointestinal parasites are extremely common in dogs and cats entering animal shelters. Studies show that around 30% of adult dogs and cats have intestinal parasites in samples collected at shelter intake, and virtually all puppies and kittens have roundworms. Unfortunately, sending fecal samples to a laboratory for analysis is prohibitively expensive for most shelters. In-house fecal analysis can be more affordable, if you have trained staff and a microscope available. If you are looking at fecal samples in-house, here are a few tips:

Simple fecal flotation is the most common method of looking for parasite eggs. However, taking the extra step of centrifuging the sample can greatly increase the yield, making eggs much easier to find and identify. Spin samples in an appropriate tube at 1,200 rpm for 5 minutes.

Looking at a direct mount (small amount of feces mixed with normal saline) can also be useful for finding giardia or larval worms.

Several drug companies make laminated cards or books with pictures of common parasite eggs, available free to students and customers. Ask the companies you buy products from what they have available.

For more information, check out the Companion Animal Parasite Council at http://www.capcvet.org/
Adoption Counseling for Cats: Ms. Kelley Bollen, MA, CABC

Good adoption counseling helps to ensure that the animals we place are successful in their new homes. We, as shelter professionals, know that it’s hard for pets to go to a new environment but most people don’t really give that much thought. They think they will bring their new pet home and everything will fall into place. We need to spend the time to educate our adopters about things that will help ensure a successful transition for the animal.

Cats often have a hard time adjusting to change and it can take days or weeks before a cat feels comfortable in a new environment. It’s important to educate your cat adopters that hiding is the number one coping mechanism cats have to deal with stress so it’s natural for a cat to hide when she goes to a new home. Adopters should be told not to pull the new cat from her hiding place or force her to accept handling or to be social with the family. In time, when she feels safe, she will venture out on her own. If the adopters want to be more proactive they can sit quietly in the room where the cat is hiding with a dish of tuna fish next to them to help entice the cat out.

Adopters should also be educated about how to introduce their new cat to any resident cats or dogs. The best way is to set up a “safe room” where the new cat will live for the first few days or weeks. The resident animals will know there is a new cat in the house and may sniff under the door to get to know the scent of their new housemate. Doing some “scent exchange” can also be helpful. Advise them to rub the new cat with a washcloth and then rub their resident cat/s with the same washcloth. Going back and forth with this washcloth every day will help the cats get to know each other’s scent. After several days with the door closed, they can progress to putting up a barrier in the doorway so that the animals can see each other without being able to physically get to each other. Stacking two baby gates, one on top of the other to prevent the cat/s from jumping over or installing a screen door in the doorway gives the animals this opportunity. When its time to physically introduce the animals, they should do so in short supervised sessions with plenty of positive reinforcement. The resident dog should be on leash the first few sessions to prevent any chasing of the new cat.

It’s also helpful to discuss litterbox issues with cat adopters. If the cat was an owner-surrender, you should have asked the previous owner what type of litter the cat used successfully in their home. This information can then be passed on to the new adopter as cats are habitual and it’s best to use the litter they are accustomed to. They should also be told that most cats prefer unscented litter, uncovered boxes, and a private yet accessible location for the litter box. If they have multiple cats they should be advised to have multiple boxes and to make sure the boxes are in multiple locations in the house. And most importantly, they should be told to keep the litter box/s clean.

The last bit of advice every cat adopter should be given is to provide scratching posts so that the cat doesn’t decide to use the furniture for this normal cat behavior. A good scratching post is sturdy, covered with a substrate that cats like to scratch (sisal rope, corrugated cardboard or natural wood are preferred by most) and placed in prominent areas of the home, not hidden in the basement or a back bedroom.

If your cat adopters get this information from you before they take their new cat home it is much more likely that the cat will adjust to their home and the adoption will be successful.

“Good adoption counseling helps to ensure that the animals we place are successful in their new homes.”
Keeping People Healthy: Dr. Jan Scarlett

Who provides care for cats in our shelters? In our experience, they are most often women, and frequently women of child-bearing age. When asked whether these women are aware of their risk of acquiring toxoplasmosis, some say “yes” and others are completely unaware.

The organism causing toxoplasmosis, *Toxoplasma gondii*, is a microscopic protozoan that can be shed in the feces of recently infected cats or kittens. Cats usually become infected when they are young, and are the age group most likely to shed infective, microscopic oocysts. The good news is that infected cats only shed oocysts for 2-3 weeks once in their lifetime, and the oocysts must be out of the cat's body 1-5 days before they become infective for other cats or people. The bad news is that once they become infective, they can last in the environment for weeks or months. The infective oocysts are not killed easily with disinfectants, but mechanical removal with hot water and scrubbing will remove most (if not all) of the oocysts from litter boxes. Ideally, the litter boxes should be immersed in boiling water to actually kill any remaining infective organisms.

People become infected when their hands are contaminated with cat feces and they accidently eat or breathe in the oocysts. Most infected humans show no or very mild, flu-like signs. If a woman is infected when pregnant, however, the organism can infect the fetus, sometimes causing severe signs including mental retardation, convulsions, and blindness. Infections during early pregnancy usually cause the most severe signs in the fetus. These signs are generally not manifest at birth, but rather become apparent as the baby matures even occurring as late as early adulthood. Precautions against infection in a shelter are easy – clean litter boxes daily, wear gloves and/or wash hands well after cleaning litter boxes, and avoid dusty litters. With recommendations to spot clean cat cages (to minimize cat stress), however, the risk of exposure to infective oocysts may be increased, so wearing gloves and thorough hand-washing is essential!!

The most common mode of human infection is not exposure to cat feces, but rather the consumption of undercooked beef, pork or mutton. Despite this, all staff cleaning litter boxes should be aware of the risk of toxoplasmosis, the precautions they must take, and should be encouraged to discuss their risk with their physicians, especially if they are pregnant or at risk of becoming pregnant.

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Events Calendar

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- Dr. Greenberg HSVMA (RAVS)
- Dr. Riley HSVMA (RAVS)
- New Intern Orientation