

Source: <http://www.fecava.org/en/press-release/press-release-1/world-small-animal-veterinary-congress-2017-joint-wsavafecavadsava-panel-discussion-on-brachycephalic-dogs.htm>

World small animal veterinary congress 2017-Joint WSAVA/FECAVA/DSAVA Panel discussion on brachycephalic dogs [Share](#)

Placed at 19/09/2017

Cute or calamitous?

Vets sound the alarm on the health and welfare of flat-faced dogs during FECAVA/WSAVA/DSAVA Congress in Copenhagen

The rise in the popularity of so-called brachycephalic (flat-faced) breeds, including pugs and French bulldogs, is linked to concerning trends for dog health and welfare, according to the Federation of European Companion Animal Veterinary Associations (FECAVA), the World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) and the Danish Small Animal Veterinary Association (DSAVA/FHKS).

Experts from around the world discussed the issues facing these breeds and the implications for veterinarians during a panel session following a lecture stream dedicated to hereditary disease and the importance of responsible breeding Congress on Tuesday 26 September, at the occasion of the joint FECAVA/WSAVA/DSAVA world congress of companion animal veterinarians. They issued a number of recommendations to help veterinarians to encourage greater education and attitudinal change among pet owners.

All three associations also appealed to stakeholders including veterinarians, breeders, breed societies and the pet-buying public, to take steps to improve the health and welfare of brachycephalic dogs.

Commenting, DSAVA President Anne Sørensen said: “Extreme flat-faced dogs have become victims of their own popularity but their ‘cute’ faces often come at the price of compromised health and welfare. Problems can include severe breathing difficulties – leading to lack of exercise and obesity-related problems – eye ulcers, spine abnormalities and skin-fold dermatitis, as well as reproductive, dental and behavioural disorders. Unfortunately, many owners don’t realise that these dogs may suffer for their looks and, as veterinarians, it is important to us to highlight this issue and help owners to understand the full implications for brachycephalic dogs.”

FECAVA President Jerzy Gawor commented: “As veterinarians, we put the best interests of our patients first. For affected animals – including flat-faced dogs but also cats and rabbits - this may involve performing surgical procedures to correct or overcome conformational disorders, such as enlarging the nostrils, shortening the soft palate, correcting the bite or performing Caesarean sections. We are concerned that these procedures – which should be exceptional – are becoming the norm in many brachycephalic breeds.”

WSAVA President Walt Ingwersen added: “Our members see the results of extreme brachycephalic confirmation in practice on a regular basis and it is one of our top animal welfare concerns. The discussion panel helped to highlight the complex issues raised by the popularity of these breeds and to explore potential solutions. A reduction in the health problems faced by these breeds will be most effectively achieved through the education of veterinary professionals, breeders and owners and through leadership and consensus-building between stakeholders.”

All three associations committed to develop and contribute to initiatives that aim to address the health and welfare of these animals. Expert panel member Professor Åke Hedhammar, member of the WSAVA Hereditary Disease Committee and scientific advisor to the Swedish Kennel Club, stressed: “We will continue to work with all stakeholders who can positively influence and improve the health and welfare of brachycephalic breeds. Extreme phenotypes should be avoided and, in the show ring, moderation of such phenotypes should be rewarded. Animals showing extremes of conformation that negatively impact their health and welfare should not be used for breeding.”

FECAVA past president Monique Megens, chair of the panel discussion, added: “We strongly urge potential owners to talk to their local veterinarian before buying a dog. As vets, we can help them choose what may be the best breed for them – and how to identify a responsible breeder.”

Notes for Editors

- *The World Small Animal Veterinary Association ([WSAVA](#)) aims to advance the health and welfare of companion animals worldwide through creating an educated, committed and collaborative global community of veterinary peers. It currently represents more than 200,000 veterinarians through 105 member associations. Its annual World Congress brings together globally respected experts to offer cutting edge thinking on all aspects of companion animal veterinary care.*
- *The Federation of European Companion Animal Veterinary Associations ([FECAVA](#)) is the platform for the promotion of the professional development and representation of companion animal veterinarians in Europe. Founded in 1990, it currently has 40 national member associations and 13 associate member associations. FECAVA represents over 25,000 companion animal practitioners throughout Europe.*
- *The Danish Small Animal Veterinary Association ([DSAVA/FHKS](#)) represents small animal veterinarians in Denmark and has 1,000 members. It was the host organisation for the 2017 FECAVA/WSAVA Congress.*
- *Members of the expert panel (for full bios, see attached document)*
 - *Peter Sandøe (DK) – professor of ethics and welfare*
 - *Helle Friis Proschowsky (DK) – vet working with the Danish Kennel Club*
 - *Laurent Findji (FR/UK) – specialist in soft tissue surgery*
 - *Gudrun Ravetz (UK) – BVA president with extensive media experience in brachycephalic dogs*

- *Kirstin Wear Prestud (NO) – veterinary scientific director of the Norwegian Kennel Club*
- *Åke Hedhammar (SE), professor em. in internal medicine (companion animals), veterinary consultant for the Swedish Kennel Club and member of the WSAVA Hereditary Disease Committee.*

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