

International Challenges for Dog Breeding:

How do Veterinarians Navigate the Complexities of Health, Welfare, and Owner Attachment?

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Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre (SJDAWC)

Animal Welfare Concerns with Dog Breeding



The talk will be available with PDF immediately following the presentation on DogWellNet.com under BLOGS: Brenda's blog. <https://dogwellnet.com/blogs/entry/235-how-do-veterinarians-navigate-the-complexities-of-health-welfare-and-owner-attachment/>





Background

- The health and welfare of dogs with extreme conformation, especially Brachycephalics, continues to be a hot topic internationally – spurring:
 - conversation, controversy, and conflict – litigation and legislation – concern, outrage and anger on all sides of the equation.
- Professional organizations have made supportive statements but veterinarians on the frontlines are caught between:
 - massively increased numbers of dogs, extreme owner attachment, and practical, moral and ethical issues.



Background

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- Professional organizations have made supportive statements but veterinarians on the frontlines are caught between:
 - massively increased numbers of dogs, extreme owner attachment, and practical, moral and ethical issues.
- Petitions against breeding and cries for more responsibility by dog breeders or owners do not relieve veterinarians of their responsibilities.
- Discussions have expanded to include broader issues of dog breeding and breeders, and everything is aggravated by pandemic problems.



Goals

- Outline, in the context of recent international and national developments:
 - What steps can individual veterinarians take for their own well-being as well as that of clients and dogs?
 - What should veterinary organizations do?

The International Partnership for Dogs (IPFD) has been involved with these issues for years, providing evidence-based, multi-stakeholder resources on <https://DogWellNet.com> .



Outline

- Discuss the array of **stakeholders** involved in these issues
- Review definitions of **health and welfare and human-dog interactions** in this context
- Briefly review the history of veterinary involvement from:
 - **Late 1800's early 1900's**
 - **1960's**
 - **Early 2000's**
 - **NOW!**

SUPPLY

Kennel and Breed Clubs
Responsible breeding

*Responsible sourcing
and distribution*

Producers, distributors
i.e. breeders, brokers,
dealers

Legislators,
regulators



Welfare sector,
re-homing
(shelters, online
services, rescues)

DEMAND

The Public and
individual consumers

*Responsible dog ownership
Responsible ACQUISITION
Responsible Rehoming*

Researchers, veterinarians,
institutions and organizations

Pet industry



International Actions

Legislation (dogs) / Enforcement

- The Netherlands
 - Measuring the CFR and refuse breeding for those with less than 30% snout... (not going all that well)

Legislation (breeding)

- Sweden, Ireland, others
 - In place or more coming soon.
 - Unclear how they will enforce.

Legal/ Litigation

- Norway
 - Against specific breeders, breed clubs and kennel club. But the wider implications are unclear

Petitions

- Veterinary – Sweden, UK
- Breed banning – FECAVA, worldwide
- Australia





Legislation in a nutshell:

- Many laws have been written - few welfare laws are well-enforced
- Norwegian law that **“requires that all animals are bred with good function and health and prohibits breeding that alters or perpetuates hereditary traits that adversely affect the animals’ physical and mental functions, reduces their ability to engage in natural behaviour, or provoke general ethical reactions.”**
- Queensland Australia their Welfare Standards include: **“A dog with an exhibited deleterious heritable condition that has the potential to adversely impact on the **welfare of the progeny** must not be used for breeding”**
- And similar statements exist in laws or guidelines in Sweden, The UK, Ireland, and other countries in Europe.

Five Freedoms - the gold standard of animal welfare

- Freedom from Hunger and Thirst
- Freedom from Discomfort
- Freedom from Pain, Injury, Disease
- Freedom to express Normal Behaviour
- Freedom from Fear and Distress

*Talking here about heritable conditions – dogs (and offspring) should be able to **reliably** achieve:*

Conditions, e.g., that can be passed on to the offspring:*



Five Freedoms - the gold standard of animal welfare

Freedom from Hunger and Thirst

*Talking here about heritable conditions – dogs (and offspring) should be able to **reliably** achieve:*

- With an appropriately caring owner all dogs should achieve this; note that some may need to be fed with raised bowls to prevent respiratory distress; and be careful not to overfeed.

Freedom from Discomfort

- **What causes discomfort:** breathing difficulties, e.g. in brachycephalic (short nosed) dogs mean that they may always be in a state of low oxygen; chronic eye problems; skin problems – allergy/atopy/infections; dental issues; chronic back, leg problems. (and obesity can aggravate)

Freedom from Pain, Injury, Disease

- **Acute conditions can happen to any dog – the worry here are chronic, especially heritable conditions** – spinal problems, hip and elbow dysplasia, knee problems, brachycephalic airway disease, eye disease, chronic skin problems, cancer, early mortality, risk of injury due to conformation.

Freedom to express Normal Behaviour

- **Basic normal behaviour for ALL dogs** – Ability to groom themselves (i.e. reach all parts of the body), to exercise at a normal level for a dog; ability to cope with reasonable heat and cold, ability to communicate with other dogs – facial mobility, tails/ears. Also includes normal reproductive behaviour (for breeding animals) – able to conceive and whelp without assistance. People tend to excuse some of these as ‘normal’ for the breed but they are basic welfare concerns.

Freedom from Fear and Distress

- **In terms of inheritance** – Dogs they are stoic and attempt to adapt; but discomfort may turn to distress – e.g. physiological distress from lack of oxygen in brachycephalics. Hesitance to exercise may be an indication. People may not recognize signs of distress that are expressions of welfare problems.

Conditions, e.g., that can be passed on to the offspring:*

- Body conformation / structure e.g. head shape and size, overall body size, predisposition to hip/ elbow problems
- Skin folds, which predispose to infections; allergy/ atopy. Eye issues
- Vertebral abnormalities (short back, tail)
- Thick neck, constricted nares, thick set bodies, abnormal teeth.
- Inability to reproduce on own (because of physical structure)

** Especially when selected for specifically to satisfy a desire for ‘type’*



British Bulldog

1870

2010



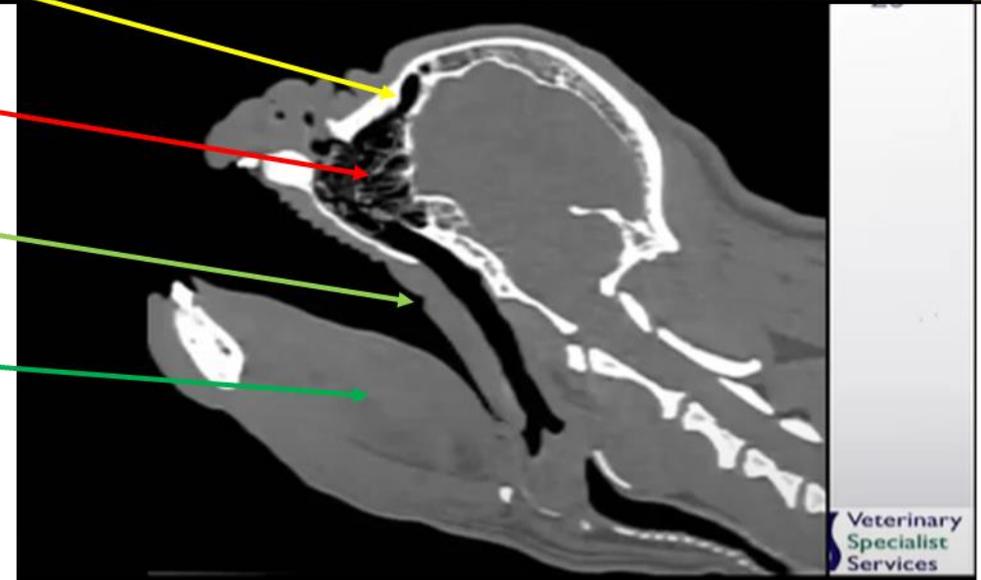
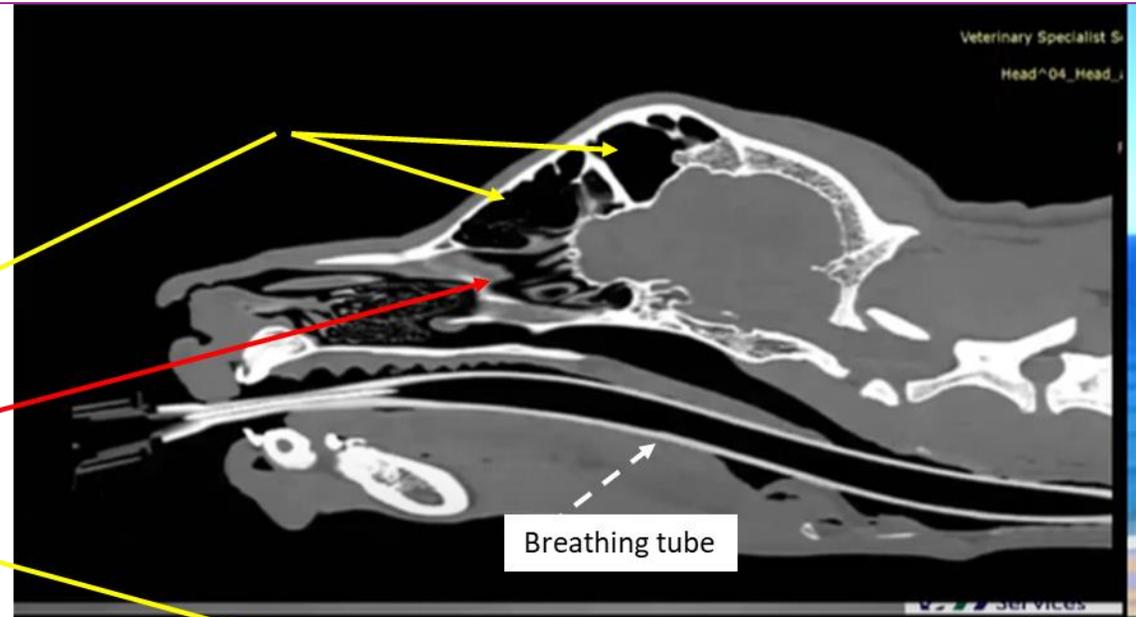
CT scan – of an average dog and a brachycephalic

Sinuses – black indicates air

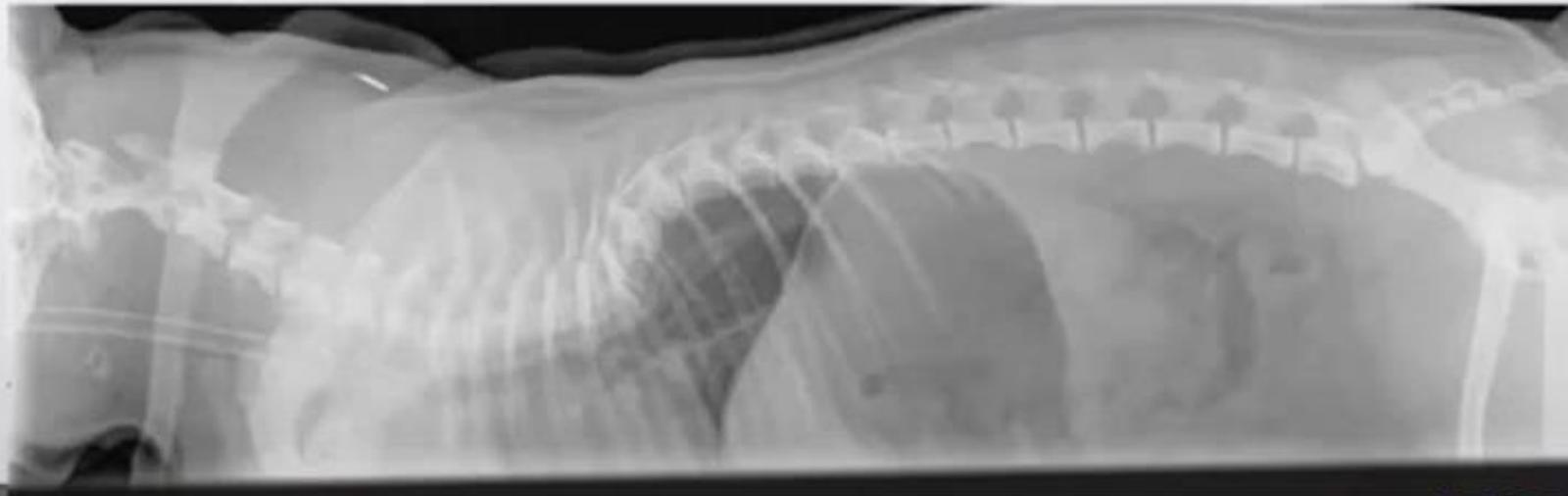
Nasal turbinates – meant to be in layers

Soft palate – meant NOT to go down throat into larynx

Tongue – disproportionately large in brachy dogs



Hemivertebrae
present in 80% of
French Bulldogs



Adjunct Professor Philip A. Moses BVSc, MRCVS, Cert SAO, MANZCVS, FANZCVS Specialist Small Animal Surgeon





Corneal Ulcer in a Pug: Bruce's Eye Injury

by Jana Rade / 4 Comments

<https://mydogsymptoms.com/corneal-ulcer-in-a-pug-bruces-eye-injury/>



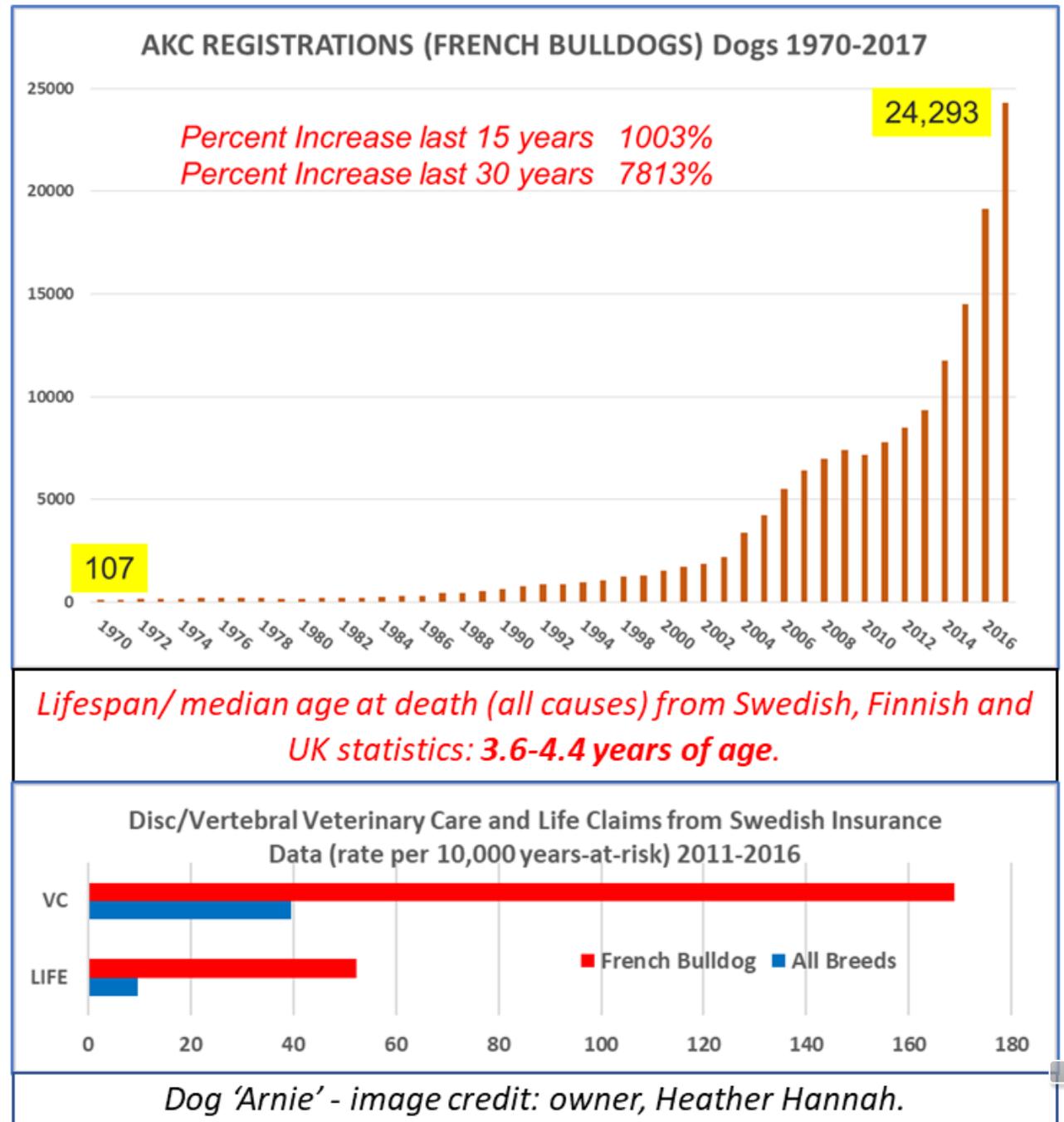
How did we get to this point?



- Early 1900's – outrage at changes to Bulldogs
- 1960's – research starts on BOAS, recognition of various problems in brachycephalic dogs. BUT – there are few of them so... vets... ?? Ignore?? Focus on popular breeds and hip dysplasia.
- 2000's – increasing recognition of problems in some pedigree dogs.
 - **Outcry, powerful educational campaigns, position statements**
- Massive increase in popularity of French Bulldogs, Pugs, others.
- **Whoops !!??**
- Perhaps we have been taken aback by the sheer force of popularity of short-muzzles — and we blame that on **celebrities and media**. But we know now, thanks to research, that it is mainly based on the increased desire for small, extreme dogs that are perceived by their owners as cute or "funny" and having other desirable characteristics, such as a supposed low need for exercise.
- **We can decry owners who "just don't get it," but what about the veterinarians and paraprofessionals who own and even breed these dogs?**



The veterinary profession at some level allowed this to happen....





Personal focus vs. the Big Picture

Essentially ...

The problem has two basic components, i.e.,

- the welfare of the dogs
vs.
- what people want (e.g. breeders and owners)

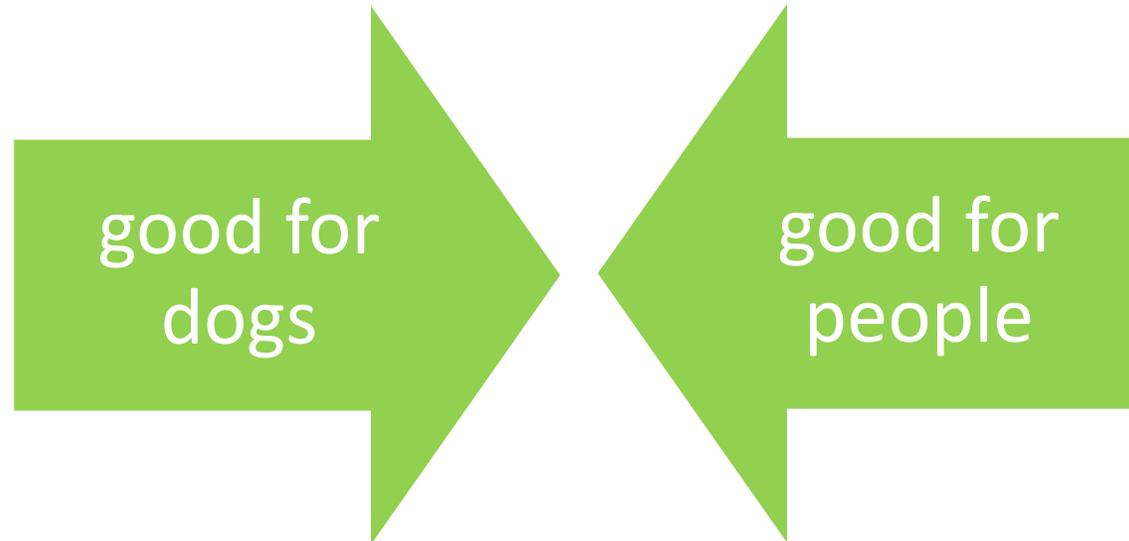
- Further complicated within each category...
- Individual dogs... Breeds ...
Right now... in the future
- Owners – their desire for trendy, cute, funny, fur-babies
- Show breeders
- Commercial breeders...

Looking for simple solutions to a complex problem

How do we move from this....



To this....





Definitions: Health and Welfare in Dogs

- And the role of human-animal interactions
- Everyone wants healthy dogs with good welfare – everyone says just that.
- BUT – specific definitions are challenging and conflicts arise

Spectrum of Definitions – dog health and welfare: *words matter!*



Health – absence of disease

Absence of **preventable** disease... or just an
acceptable level of disease? **Rate? Risk?**

Welfare – absence of **pain and suffering**

Adequate, acceptable welfare
And how is that defined?

- Additional problems arise when we generalize across, cultures, across diseases, breeds, etc!

Spectrum of Definitions – dog health and welfare:

AND we can't ignore Human-dog interactions!



Health – absence of disease

Absence of **preventable** disease... or just an *acceptable level* of disease? **Rate? Risk?**

Welfare – absence of **pain and suffering**

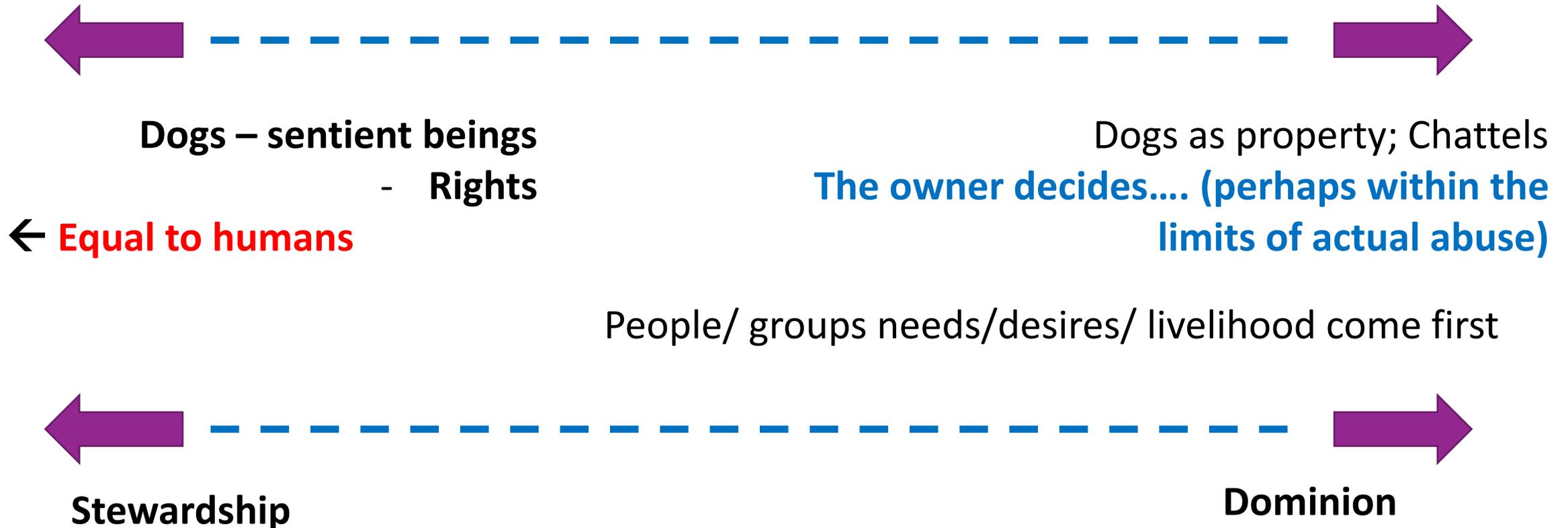
Adequate, acceptable welfare
• **Not black and white!**

- Additional problems arise when we generalize across, cultures, across diseases, breeds, etc!

Support/consider good **HUMAN ANIMAL INTERACTIONS** – everything people and dogs do together, human-animal bond, how animals enrich our lives and society, etc.



Spectrum of roles and relationships with people ... may be regional, cultural



*This is not strictly separated by East-West or Developed-Developing countries.
Prevailing sentiment in the USA is towards the right, e.g.*



Definition – dog health and welfare

... Human-dog interactions



One can hope that human concerns should be subsumed by dog health and welfare, but even “Pandemic Puppies” taught us that reality is very different.

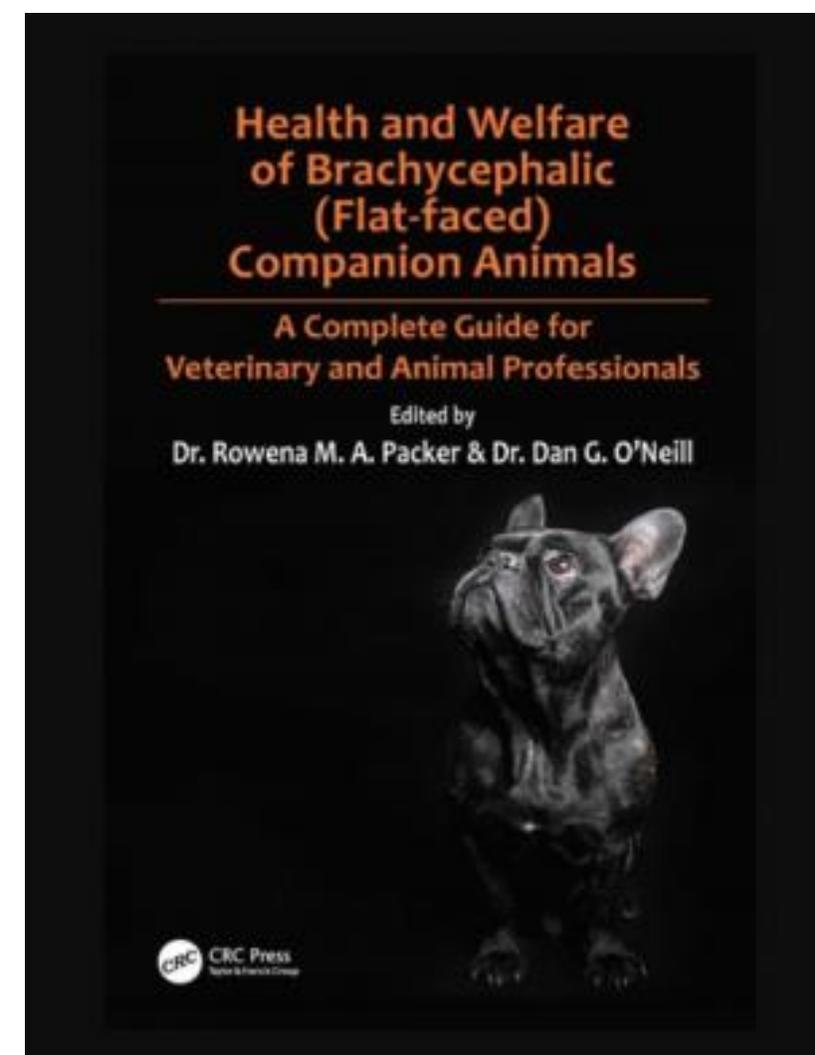
Can we understand the **spectrum...**
and achieve a reasonable **balance?**



Words and Actions - Veterinarians

- Have we been complicit? – “Normal for the breed...”
 - Not stressing health issues/ recording in record because we don’t want to upset the owner
 - “Well, they already have the dog... and they love it... and, and, and...”
- Do we struggle with a conflict of interest?
 - The individual dog?
 - The owner?
 - The money?
 - Short-term vs. long-term?

- by Rowena Packer and Dan O'Neill
- IPFD - international aspects
- Ethics
- Communication



Health and Welfare of Brachycephalic (Flat-faced) Companion Animals - A Complete Guide for Veterinary and Animal Professionals;
Edited By Rowena Packer, Dan O'Neill; Copyright Year 2021. https://www.routledge.com/Health-and-Welfare-of-Brachycephalic-Flat-faced-Companion-Animals-A-Complete/Packer-ONeill/p/book/9780367207243?fbclid=IwAR2Z2AhWFHjtM-_is1nxFoZQhKkBCbRTHgxv7_Rv3b5OUeXHlv_ZMUmCwIE%20



Veterinarians and Brachycephalic Dogs - Ethics and Reality

<https://dogwellnet.com/blogs/entry/205-veterinarians-and-brachycephalic-dogs-ethics-and-reality/>

- Paradoxically - Owners don't recognize health problems; acquire dogs in spite of knowing they will need expensive veterinary care and might not live long.
- Chapter 4 **Ethical Challenges of Treating Brachycephalic Dogs** was written by Anne Quain and Paul McGreevy, University of Sydney and Siobhan Mullan, University College Dublin.
- **What balanced directions are there for the caring veterinary professionals, in an increasingly busy practice? How do they cope when appointments are too short and too packed to have life-changing discussions with a client? What options are there when up to 50% (or more) of practitioners (depending on country) now work in corporate practices where decisions about which clients to see, what major efforts can be undertaken is out of the average vet's hands? And where making money is a harsh reality.**



Communication

- The book outlines **communication strategies** that can be used to approach this touchy situation. But veterinarians in practice, especially under conditions of the pandemic, are stretched thin. They may not have time for nuanced conversations.
- In a nutshell, we have a lot of clients with compromised dogs who do not want to hear about it. Owners are extremely attached. Veterinarians normalize problems because they don't want to be confrontational and are pressed for time. **So, cognitive dissonance is a problem. Veterinarians may treat the patient in front of them and hope someone else will fix the wider problem.**

Actions by vets in the UK: ... must be seen as a concern for individual dogs and breeds of dogs; presumably prompted by the extraordinary numbers of sick animals seen by these veterinarians and by the numbers of distraught owners struggling to pay for their care.

From: <https://dogwellnet.com/blogs/entry/210-the-great-divide-%C2%A0responses-to-challenges-in-extreme-breeds/>



TURN TABLE RECORDS



**MUSIC,
ANYWHERE**

UK Brands please stop!

Frenchies, Pugs and Persians have become the poster pets for advertising, but behind those cute faces lies horrifying health problems. These are caused by over-breeding to meet demand for the nation's most fashionable pets. We call on companies to help us #EndTheTrend.



IPFD
DogWellNet



Petitions and calls for 'banning'

- "Calls for bans on breeding short-nosed dogs gain momentum" published last year by the VIN News Service.
- BUT: Advocates of breed bans, which are mainly an emotional response, seek a simple solution to a very complex problem
- And do vets really want to see all brachycephalics 'gone'?
- What will come next if people like extremes?

- See: **Vet Information Network (VIN) Article: Banning brachycephalic breeds is unrealistic**
<https://dogwellnet.com/blogs/entry/213-vet-information-network-vin-article-banning-brachycephalic-breeds-is-unrealistic/>
- And: V.I.N. article: Banning brachycephalic breeds is unrealistic
<https://news.vin.com/default.aspx?pid=210&ld=10464873>



This requires a change in **CULTURE!**

- There are existing attitudes within each stakeholder group – dog breeders (kennel club and outside), pet industry, veterinarian, and owners... with both converging and diverging 'values'
- A culture is defined by VALUES - Values drive BEHAVIOUR - Behaviours should reflect values
- **If behaviours are not congruent with/reflective of values – why?**
 - Either the stated values of the community are not the true values... &/or
 - Values are perhaps ideal belief systems, but do not reflect actual priorities... &/ or
 - Perhaps the behaviours are not understood to be in conflict with values.
 - E.g. Breeders: we all value health and longevity! Then they must change **selection to prioritize health and longevity.**
 - E.g. Vets – routinely helping dogs that cannot breed or whelp naturally – offering elective c-sections, etc. goes against one of the principles of the Five Freedoms for Welfare. But...
- For vets it is often the conflict between the desire, need to address the individual dog... but **where would you draw the line?**



Pedigree dog health and welfare

- Will not be achieved by doing a few more health tests before breeding.
 - Many of the biggest problems arise from Big Picture problems – e.g. conformation, lack of longevity, inbreeding, and conditions for which there are no health tests.
 - A desire to produce what people want.
 - Some breeds will need to be outcrossed to get back to health.
- The major problems of dog health and welfare relate to human behaviours and attitudes – across all stakeholders. If we cannot change this the accomplishments will be limited and slow.
- Dogs are commodities. Yes, they are sentient BUT in our world they are bought and sold. The market and associated problems are driven more by **demand (consumers)**... but ‘we’ routinely focus on trying to manage supply.



What can you do?

- Change even one viewpoint – start with yourself.
- Affirm your ethical principles and examine your behavior. If there is a disconnect, identify **small steps** to move in the right direction. That could involve no longer normalizing problems and recording issues in the medical records. Owners could be told, kindly and compassionately, that while certain health issues may be typical in the breed, they are **not** normal for dogs. Prevent obesity!
- Don't propagate the problem:
 - Try to get people whose dogs require surgical altering, such as for narrow nasal passages and elongated palates, to spay or neuter their dogs.
 - If the veterinary body or kennel club in your area has a registry for surgeries, such as that offered by the Kennel Club in the United Kingdom, contribute to it.
 - Do not assist compromised dogs to breed and do not engage in (multiple) elective surgeries for births.
 - Talk to your clients. Talk to veterinarians and techs who own these dogs. Find out their ethical standpoints and try to move them ahead, one step at a time.
 - Lead by example
 - Don't post or share '(not-)funny' pictures of dogs or images of compromised breeds
- You also may want to lobby your professional association, telling them that this is a problem that needs concerted effort, practical solutions and cooperation across all stakeholders in dog health and welfare.
- Lobby the pet industry against use of compromised breeds in advertising.

Veterinarians in practice

Evolution

- Never normalize health and welfare problems
 - Breed-typical disease – clinical signs of BOAS, etc.; extremes of conformation, skin folds, protruding eyes, abnormal dentition, missing and hemi-vertebra.
 - Tell the owner ‘these’ are clinical signs and caused by abnormal, deleterious conditions and NOT normal – note that the dog has a health issue in the medical record
 - Obesity – especially in brachycephalic breeds; chondrodystrophic breeds.
- Provide clear statements to new clients, all clients
 - Info sheets on not only health but welfare implications
 - Posters in your waiting room – focus on healthy dogs doing dog things... not anthropomorphic.
 - NOT cute brachys but graphics of problems
- Do not share images of dogs with extremes of conformation.
- If microchipping at breeder is required but chip is missing, be straightforward on what that means in terms of source and possibly quality of breeder.

Revolution

- IF you support legislation to eliminate compromised breeds, then you should:
- Be willing to hold your own moral/ethical ground, e.g.:
 - Post a notice that you will serve existing clients, but will no longer accept new patients from compromised breeds because that would be perpetuating health and welfare problems.
 - Inform clients of these breeds, as their pets age, that if they choose to get the same breed again, you will not be able to have the dog as your patient.
- Do more to NOT perpetuate dogs and breeds that cannot conceive, carry, and whelp litters on their own.
 - Do not assist in artificial insemination in compromised breeds
 - Spay at c-section
 - Neuter/spay when any correctional surgery is done
 - Or do not do the procedure.
- Participate openly and actively in registries and data collection that endeavours to quantitate problems.





What can you do?

- Promote healthy breeds and breeding
- Try to educate...
- Do what you can, it is complex
- When it gets to be too much...
grab a cat and take a nap.





See further resources next page...





Other links:

- Animals are Sentient Beings - But Still Property – Spain <https://dogwellnet.com/blogs/entry/226-animals-are-sentient-beings-but-still-property-spain/>
- Why do legislators address the supply side and not demand? <https://dogwellnet.com/blogs/entry/224-why-do-legislators-address-the-supply-side-and-not-demand/>
- Brachycephalic Perspectives - What's New? -- References & Resources List 2021 <https://dogwellnet.com/forums/topic/1079-brachycephalic-perspectives-whats-new-references-resources-list-2021/#comment-2171>
- Norway dog breeding bans – what can you do to save your own breed? <https://dogwellnet.com/blogs/entry/230-norway-dog-breeding-bans-%E2%80%93-what-can-you-do-to-save-your-own-breed/>
- The IPFD Get a GRIHP! (Globally Relevant Integrated Health Profile) on
Get a GRIHP! on French Bulldogs <https://dogwellnet.com/content/health-and-breeding/breeds/breed-specific-health-reports/get-a-grihp-on-french-bulldogs-r700/> and
Get a GRIHP! on Pugs <https://dogwellnet.com/content/health-and-breeding/breeds/breed-specific-health-reports/get-a-grihp-on-pugs-r742/>
- Extremes of Conformation | Brachycephalics <https://dogwellnet.com/content/international-actions/extremes-of-conformation-brachycephalics/>