

A statement on 'anaesthesia-free dental procedures' for cats and dogs

The RCVS Standards Committee supports the following statement due to the animal welfare issues associated with anaesthesia free dental procedures for cats and dogs.

- 1) Oral diseases (including dental and periodontal disease) represent some of the most common and important health issues affecting pets in the UK and Europe. Effective treatment is an important part of healthcare. A professional dental examination and cleaning ("scaling and polishing") forms an essential part of treatment.
- 2) The most important area to examine and clean effectively is the gingival sulcus or periodontal pocket. This is the area below the gum line surrounding the teeth. The delicate periodontal tissues attaching the tooth to the jaws are easily damaged. This can then result in pain and possible tooth loss. Tooth scaling requires the use of sharp instruments and/or ultrasonic or sonic scalers cooled by water jets. Small, uncontrolled movements of the head during effective tooth scaling could easily lead to periodontal damage. Cleaning below the gum line is always uncomfortable. It is possible to perform scaling without anaesthesia in man, as we willingly co-operate. Pets not under anaesthetic usually will not willingly remain stationary whilst the procedure is performed.
- 3) Simply removing the visible calculus (tartar) from above the gum line is not effective or useful in tackling dental disease. The process simply makes the teeth look better, creating a false sense of confidence and security for owners and may cause harm by delaying effective treatment that can only be given by a professional veterinary health care provider.
- 4) Many oral problems can only be diagnosed during complete examination under general anaesthesia. Parts of the mouth simply cannot be seen without anaesthesia. Some early oral cancers can only be seen when the pet is under chemical restraint. Delaying diagnosis of these problems can mean that they become far more difficult to treat, or may even become untreatable. Many oral diseases can only be diagnosed by x-ray examination. This is only possible in an anaesthetised pet.
- 5) Modern anaesthetic procedures, together with appropriate monitoring and support, carry very low levels of risk. In general terms the benefits of effective dental and periodontal treatment far outweigh the risks of the anaesthetic. Use of intubation – where a tube carries the anaesthetic gases directly into the trachea (wind-pipe) protects the patient from inhalation of dental debris, or the bacteria-rich aerosol, created during the dental procedure.

- 6) In summary, “anaesthesia-free dental procedures”:
- a) cannot allow full oral examination to be performed and vitally important diagnoses may be missed or delayed;
 - b) do not allow full and effective cleaning of the most important sub-gingival areas;
 - c) may actually cause damage to the tissues surrounding the teeth;
 - d) may cause discomfort, pain and/or distress to the animal;
 - e) are likely to delay clients accessing effective, proper oral care;
 - f) if performed under the guise of a “Dental Treatment” could be considered misleading; unless the owners are made aware of the inadequate and potentially injurious nature of the procedure.
- 7) This statement is issued with the agreement of:
- a) EVDC (European Veterinary Dental College)
 - b) EVDS (European Veterinary Dental Society)
 - c) The current recognised Specialists in Veterinary Dentistry practising in the UK
 - d) BVDA (British Veterinary Dental Association)

Additional Standards Committee advice for members of the public

- 8) RCVS considers that “anaesthesia-free dental procedures” for cats and dogs, are **not in the best interests of the health and welfare of patients.**
- 9) Members of the public considering providing anaesthesia-free dental services should be aware of their responsibilities under the Veterinary Surgeons Act and also the potential dangers of causing harm to pets which could lead to actions under the Animal Welfare Act.
- 10) Specifically performing sub-gingival scaling (scaling the pocket between the gums and the teeth), which is necessary for proper oral hygiene, and any extraction of teeth using instruments are Acts of Veterinary Surgery. Acts of Veterinary Surgery can only legally be performed by a veterinary surgeon.
- 11) Members of the public considering allowing someone to perform an anaesthesia-free dental procedure on their cat or dog should be aware that the procedure may cause harm to their pet and that, as owners, they also have a responsibility under the Animal Welfare Act to avoid this.
- 12) Members of the public should be aware that a professionally performed dental examination and cleaning procedure, carried out under anaesthesia, is usually the recommended approach to tackling the important issue of oral disease.