

7. Summary

Perioperativ pain therapy for dogs and cats in view of animal protection laws

The aim of this research was to examine the practice of peri-operative pain therapy for dogs and cats in view of animal protection laws. Post-operative pain is the result of surgical interventions that cause damage or destruction of tissue and nerves. However, due to therapeutic, pharmacological, and psychological reasons, pain-therapy following surgery is offered only in very few cases.

The animal protection law ascertains that, with respect to surgical intervention, all potential options for reducing the pain for animals are to be explored. The post-operative treatment of pain in animals, according to paragraph 9, is therefore subject to law.

For the research at hand, a questionnaire was produced, that focused on the pre-, inter- and post-operative analgesie for standard surgical interventions. Alongside multiple-choice answers, the questionnaire also offered space for individual responses, such as why a postoperative analgesie for dogs or cats had been undertaken or omitted. As it was assumed that the application of pain therapy would be different for these animal species, they were treated separately by the survey.

The research was conducted in Berlin, a city that has not only a university with a veterinarian faculty, but also many veterinarian clinics and veterinarian's private practices. With its dense population and high rate of domestic animals Berlin may be seen as representative sample.

On 17.06.1999 270 questionnaires were sent to various veterinarian offices and clinics. By 20.09.1999, 151 were answered and returned. This represents a return of 55,9%.

The overall results indicated an insufficient therapeutic analgetic in the day-to-day operations of veterinarian clinics. Only 17,5% of all respondents offered some painkilling medication to dogs, while cats received such medication only in 15% of cases. 2,6% of respondents applied an analgetic before and after surgery. For instance, in only four of 22 cases a strong analgetic of the morphine-type was applied after an osteo-synthesis for dogs.

It showed – as expected – a significant discrepancy between the treatment of both animal species. For instance, after abdominal surgery 11 veterinarians treat dogs with an analgetic, only 3 cats received from the surgeon an antiphlogistica in the first four hours, and 34 dogs but only 13 cats where treated with an analgetic drug after the first 24 hours.

The main argument against a post-operative analgetic therapy was the therapeutic onset of pain as an immobilizing force. However, this is in clear contravention of the concerns over animal protection and cannot be defended from the point of view of therapy. Alterna-

tives may consist of, among others, sedatives, intensive care, and more thorough information for the owners of the animal-patients.

In addition, respondents' arguments against pain-therapy included concerns over pharmacological side-effects or variability of therapeutic effects; however, these arguments can be countered on the basis of many studies.

The lack of perception of pain-based behaviour is another reason for the omission of post-operative pain therapy. Despite available means, such as Pain Score or the postulate of Homology, animal expression of pain is often not recognized or taken into account. The diverging analgetic treatment of cats and dogs is to be understood in this same context, as both species show different post-operative behaviours.