

Effects of Veterinary Handling on Canine Behaviour and Physiology

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Signs of distress in canine patients during routine veterinary care has been a topic too often normalized and neglected in this field. Many owners admit to delaying care for their pets because they are aware of the mental and emotional suffering that takes place during veterinary visits. The goal of this project is to develop science based recommendations for veterinarians to reduce fear and anxiety in their patients. Recent studies in Sweden have suggested that allowing dogs to have some type of control and participation during examination is critical in minimizing their distress (Hernander 2008). We wish to evaluate if repeated exposure to the veterinary exam setting makes the behaviour of canine patients better, worse, or if it has no effect. We then want to determine if this behaviour is correlated with the physiological profile of the dog's response to the exam. We are taking blood samples to measure L:N ratios, serum cortisol, and creatine phosphokinase. We also will be measuring heart rate and respiratory rate. We are hypothesizing that standard veterinary handling will result in higher physiological indicators of stress compared to those handled using fear reduction techniques. Animals should be free to exhibit natural behaviours during veterinary examinations and freedom from unpleasant states. Mental and emotional suffering of canine patients is a major welfare concern and through this research we aim to provide veterinarians learning techniques to mitigate this suffering and create a new precedent for the gold standard of care.

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