

Just What the Doctor Ordered

Non-surgical Sterilization for Cats and Dogs

By Richard De Angelis

Thanks to the efforts of humane organizations, shelter workers, veterinarians and compassionate people promoting the benefits of spay/neuter, the number of cats and dogs euthanized in this country every year has dropped dramatically from an estimated high of 13 million (21% of animals cared for as companions) in 1973 to fewer than 4 million (about 3%) today. Despite this clear success, overburdened shelters still cannot handle the influx of stray, abandoned and relinquished animals coming through their doors each year. In addition, it is estimated that tens of millions of stray and feral cats struggle to survive on their own outdoors. Although some are altered and live in managed colonies, most are not and receive no health care. They reproduce at will and many suffer from illness or injury before dying.

While educating the public about the importance of spaying or neutering has been instrumental in preventing the needless suffering and death of millions of animals, many factors ultimately limit the effectiveness of surgical sterilization as a solution to the problem of companion



When DDAL received a gift of over \$14,000 from a generous donor who requested that the money be used to fund research into non-surgical sterilization methods, we knew this could revolutionize the way the humane community deals with companion animal overpopulation.

animal overpopulation. The Doris Day Animal League is funding innovative research into a quicker, cheaper and less invasive way of sterilizing animals.

Since 1960, scientists have been exploring the development of chemical contraceptives that could permanently sterilize an animal with only one injection or treatment. This has the potential to remove many barriers that often prevent cats and dogs from being spayed or neutered by their guardians. It could dramatically increase the number of sterilized animals and, subsequently, decrease the number of euthanized animals each year.

Spay/neuter surgery requires expensive medical equipment and must be performed by licensed veterinarians who have received years of schooling to do these intricate procedures. Spay/neuter is sometimes unavailable to people in remote areas where there are no veterinarians or to low-income animal guardians who find the cost prohibitive. Even when people do have access to surgical sterilization, the recovery time required—particularly in the case of a spay—can place an additional burden on both the veterinary or shelter staff and the guardian.

By comparison, chemical contraceptives would require no more invasive a procedure than a shot, demand virtually no recovery time and could be delivered by veterinary technicians or shelter workers with minimal training and expense.

After decades of research, two pharmaceutical companies recently put contraceptive products for dogs on the market: Neutersol™, from Addison Laboratories, and Suprelorin™ from Peptech Animal Health. Despite its success,

Neutersol™, the first permanent, injectible sterilant for puppies, is temporarily unavailable while the creators look for a new marketing partner. Suprelorin™ is a contraceptive implant approved in Australia and New Zealand that produces sterility in male dogs for approximately six months before requiring replacement. So far, no one has developed a permanent chemical contraceptive that would work in both cats and dogs. That is where the Doris Day Animal League hopes to help make a difference.

When DDAL received a gift of over \$14,000 from a generous donor who requested that the money be used to fund research into non-surgical sterilization methods, we knew this could revolutionize the way the humane community deals with companion animal overpopulation. We turned to the Alliance for Contraception in Cats and Dogs (ACC&D) to help determine worthy recipients of the grant. ACC&D is an international, collaborative effort to save the lives of cats and dogs and to reduce their numbers through development of non-surgical technologies for the humane control of cat and dog populations. ACC&D brings together researchers, disciplines and institutions to speed discovery of new contraceptive technologies for cats and dogs. The organization's president, Joyce Briggs, long time animal advocate and Spay Day USA supporter, joined with ACC&D science advisors to find the best research team for our grant.

ACC&D directed us to SenesTech, Inc., a laboratory located in Flagstaff, Arizona, where Loretta P. Mayer, Ph.D., and her team have been conducting research on a new, permanent contraceptive for companion animals. This contraceptive, ChemSpay™, is an injection administered to female cats and dogs to



prematurely age the ovaries and render them infertile. Preliminary studies have been done on dogs, but it is anticipated that it will work as well on cats and even other mammals.

With the funding provided by DDAL, SenesTech will begin a new study on dogs from the Navajo Nation reservation in Arizona, which has a huge stray population and high euthanasia rate. Dogs selected from shelters on the reservation will be adopted to good homes, and their new guardians will accompany the canines to SenesTech's labs to receive their ChemSpay™ injections. The dogs will return for subsequent visits to monitor the product's effectiveness.

Through this study, the "res dogs" will be given a new lease on life and also provide the hope that countless other animals will never have to endure the hardships of life on the street or the tragedy of a premature and undeserved death.

Briggs is hopeful that Dr. Mayer will be able to give a preliminary report on the success of this study by mid-November 2006, in time for the ACC&D's next symposium on non-surgical sterilization. The next step will be financial backing from a pharmaceutical company and approval from the Food and Drug Administration. If all the studies

go as anticipated, Briggs is optimistic that ChemSpay™ could be available to veterinarians and shelters in two to five years.

"I commend the Doris Day Animal League and Doris Day Animal Foundation for their ongoing commitment to promoting spay/neuter,



Photos by: SenesTech, Inc.

These animals were involved in a previous study at SenesTech, similar to the one being funded by DDAL on the Navajo Reservation. Development of non-surgical sterilization methods could revolutionize the way the humane community deals with companion animal overpopulation.

and applaud their leadership in helping to create a new generation of tools that will save even more animals' lives," Briggs said.

For more information on the Alliance for Contraception in Cats and Dogs, to register for its symposium in November 2006 and to sign a petition demonstrating support for non-surgical sterilization, please visit www.acc-d.org. 

