

Devocalization of Dogs

Position:

The Edmonton Humane Society does not support the “devocalization” of companion animals unless deemed medically necessary by a veterinarian.

Summary

- Ventriculocordectomy (devocalization) can lead to health concerns and discomfort after the surgery, the surgical procedure itself may pose an unnecessary level of risk, and devocalization surgeries do not always fully eliminate barking.
- Devocalization may eliminate the symptom but does not address the underlying behavioural or medical cause for barking.
- Medical intervention, behavioural intervention, or a combination of these should be used to address excessive barking.

Rationale

- Devocalization prohibits animals from exhibiting their natural behaviour and hinders their ability to communicate with humans and other animals.
- There are inherent risks associated with surgery, such as anesthesia complications, hemorrhage, aspiration, and gagging. There is also risk of post-operative complications such as acute airway swelling. The pain and stress an animal can experience as a result of the procedure pose a risk which outweighs any benefits of undergoing surgery.
- Devocalization may result in infections, laryngeal paralysis, airway stenosis, dyspnea, exercise intolerance, heat intolerance, and other concerns following surgery.
- There is a possibility that barking may reappear following devocalization surgery.
- Animals should be evaluated by a veterinarian to determine if there is a medical or behavioural explanation for excessive barking.
- Behavioural explanations for excessive barking should also be explored and treated. Excessive barking may be a manifestation of boredom, reactivity, generalized anxiety, compulsive disorders, or separation anxiety. If it is determined that excessive barking is due to environmental or behavioural conditions then behaviour modification using humane training methods, environmental management, and pharmaceutical intervention can be utilized to reduce unwanted barking.
- Electronic or citronella bark collars are not recommended due to welfare concerns, and dogs may habituate to the collar, rendering them ineffective.

References

1. American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. “Surgical Procedures for Resolving Undesirable Behavior.” ASPCA position statement, New York, n.d.
2. Humane Canada. “Medically Unnecessary Procedures.” Humane Canada position statement, Ottawa, n.d.

3. Canadian Veterinary Medical Association. "Devocalization of Dogs." CVMA position statement, Ottawa, 2016
4. American Veterinary Medical Association. "Welfare Implications of Canine Devocalization", June 2018.
5. Mills, Katelyn E et al. "A review of medically unnecessary surgeries in dogs and cats." *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* vol. 248, 2 (2016): 162-171. Doi: 10.2460/javma.248.2.162
6. Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association. "Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association Devocalization Fact Sheet" Washington, n.d.