

## IS CRUELTY GOING ON IN YOUR VET'S OFFICE??

**"Onychectomy** is an extreme measure in which the entire last digit of each toe is amputated. This is the equivalent of cutting off each of a person's fingers at the last knuckle."<sup>1</sup> Declawing is a euphemism for amputation.

**Dr. Nicholas H. Dodman** of Tuft's University School of Veterinary Medicine finds the declawing of cats abhorrent and inhumane:

"...Declawing fits the dictionary definition of mutilation to a tee. Words such as **deform, disfigure, disjoint, and dismember** all apply to this surgery. Partial digital amputation is so horrible that it has been employed for torture of prisoners of war, and in veterinary medicine, the **clinical procedure serves as a model of severe pain for testing the efficacy of analgesic drugs.**"<sup>2</sup>

Even the general anesthesia under which the amputation is done is risky. "The recovery...can be painful and lengthy and involve postoperative complications...infections, hemorrhage and [ingrown] nail regrowth."<sup>3</sup>

"The inhumanity of the procedure is clearly demonstrated by the nature of cats' recovery from anesthesia following the surgery. Unlike routine recoveries, including recovery from neutering surgeries, which are fairly peaceful, declawing surgery results in **cats bouncing off the wall of the recovery cage because of excruciating pain.**"<sup>4</sup>

Declawing is illegal in all European countries. The British Veterinary Association calls declawing "an unnecessary mutilation."<sup>5</sup>

"Declawing robs a cat of an integral means of movement and defense.....a declawed cat may be prevented from satisfying the instinctive impulses to climb, chase, exercise, and to mark territory by scratching... [cats] undergo a profound personality change.They...become extremely timid ... unusually aggressive... and inclined to bite."<sup>6</sup>

Most frequent is the complaint that once declawed, a cat ceases to use its litterbox:

"One theory is that, when cats use the box after surgery, their feet are so tender that they associate their new pain with the box permanently. Another is that, because they can no longer mark with their claws, they mark with urine..."<sup>7</sup>

Frequently, at this stage, the ruined cat is turned in to the city pound by the owner complaining of urinating out of box and other habits the cat didn't have when it was adopted!

Declawing so traumatizes cats that their lives become wasted hiding under beds, in closets, or crouched behind furniture, "out of reach of real and imaginary predators against whom they no longer have adequate defenses."<sup>8</sup>

Even individuals who claim that their cat behaved normally after the procedure, admit that physically, the cat changed. The severing of crucial tendon and nerve tissues causes the remaining

muscles to atrophy from lack of or inappropriate use. Declawed cats suffer chronic back and joint pain as shoulder, leg and back muscles weaken. Like humans in pain, cats seek relief wherever they can find it, frequently becoming over-eaters. The previously sleek cat becomes a rotund object walking on thin stumps.

**OUCH!**

**Anitra Frazier**, author of *The New Natural Cat*, referred to declawing as "cutting pieces out of animals' bodies for convenience." She wrote:

"Declawed cats are much harder for a groomer or veterinarian to handle because of their highly nervous state and their proclivity for using teeth. Cats use claws as a mode of expression....[they] are polite, they give a warning before they hurt you. If you declaw cats, you have taken away from them this means of being polite and giving warning first.....it could be likened to removing a person's larynx....even if you promise that that person would always have anything and everything that he might desire .....still, the larynx is gone. The choice of communicating in the normal way is no longer that person's choice."

**Dr. Louis J. Camuti**, a vet who practiced for more than 40 years, said, "I wouldn't declaw a cat if you paid me \$1,000 a nail!"<sup>9</sup>

### THE NEED FOR A VIDEO

An educational video will arm carepersons with the data to encourage the choice not to resort to this unconscionable torture. The inclusion of interviews with veterinarians speaking of the dangers of declawing, and European veterinarians in particular, is intended to reach unthinking Americans who unquestioningly accept this practice. In New York, for example, it is rare that a veterinarian informs the client of the risks. The superficial mindset, apparent primarily in America's large cities that declawing is fashionable, would be challenged by French, Italian and English veterinarians who find the amputation so repugnant that it is illegal in their countries because of its cruelty. The presentation is intended to take this American "fashionable cachet" out of declawing.

Methods to prevent cats from scratching furniture will be described, including cat trees, scents that lure, scents that repel, games to divert the cat's attention from the owner's good furniture to the cat's own tree or cardboard box, and other methods will be covered in the video.

### PROTOCOL FOR THE VIDEO

From my unique perspective as shelter director, since 1990, PLACE FOR CATS received 3000 calls a year from individuals who wanted to surrender a cat. Forty percent (40%) or more of all cats offered for surrender were for behavioral problems exhibited after their owners inflicted surgical paw amputation. That is 700 - 800 cats per year that PLACE FOR CATS knew about. We are a very small group. The New York city pound gets in 50,000 cats a year. Forty percent of that is 12,500.

If the statistics are comparable, the pound therefore kills 12,500 otherwise healthy cats whose only problems were identified as negative behavioral changes caused by the very people who adopted, and then mutilated them.

It came to my attention that even animal welfare activists declawed their cats. I was aghast to find that veterinarians who participated in demonstrations against laboratory cruelty at Rockefeller University failed to object to declawing and even performed the mutilation in their clinics. No wonder it's nearly impossible getting people to object to what goes on behind closed doors in laboratories. They don't even object to what goes on in their own vet's office.

### FEASIBILITY OF THE VIDEO

My idea for a video arose from the positive responses I encountered whenever I alerted someone to the dangers of declawing. Having dealt with thousands of people about cats, my experience was that 100 % of the individuals who had their cats' paws amputated had not been informed by their veterinarians of the risks of severe consequences. A video can be marketed and/or freely distributed where appropriate, with mandatory viewing at all adoption facilities by all prospective adopters, and would provide a memorable, tangible reference on the topic of paw amputation.

A broad market is expected for the video which could be aired on public television networks and shown and sold in pet supply stores. The video would be a major attraction at cat shows across the country and is expected to result in magazine and television news coverage. Word will spread by way of adoption organizations' networking as well as via advertisements and of course by word of mouth.

Our plan is to saturate the adoption and veterinarian networks with the video. We want to provide an authoritative voice which challenges the accepted practice, and puts veterinarians who profit from performing the mutilation in a position where they will have to spend time and money refuting our experts' advice against declawing. In this town, where vets can obtain sufficient income to cover rent just from performing numerous cat mutilations, any reduction in numbers will be a success. We will also consider our project a success if the veterinarians profiting from paw amputation seek to suppress the dissemination of our video. We want to encourage people to support a law against declawing and we want to see this horror eradicated in America as it is in Europe.

- Mia Lancaster

1. Surgical Claw Removal. A Radical Solution. The Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights, 1998.
2. Dodman, Nicholas, *The Cat Who Cried For Help*, p. 140.
3. *Surgical Claw Removal*, op. cit.
4. Dodman, Nicholas, *op. cit.*, p. 140.
5. "Meowch! Hands Off," *PETA's Animal Times*, spring 1998, p. 6.
6. *Surgical Claw Removal*, op. cit.
7. "Meowch! Hands Off," *op. cit.*, p. 6.
8. *ibid.*
9. *ibid.*

