Managing Obesity in People & Their Pets: 
A One Health Solution

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A recent analysis of global human obesity evaluated data from 19.2 million people in 200 countries over a 40-year period. In 1975, an estimated 3.2% of men and 6.4% of women were obese; however, by 2014, these statistics had risen to 10.8% of men and 14.9% of women. If these trends continue, it is suggested that by 2025 more women in the human population will be obese than underweight.1

Similar data exist for our canine and feline populations. A 1995 study of 21,754 U.S. dogs revealed that 34% were overweight or obese2 and, in the year 2000, 33.5% of 2661 Australian dogs surveyed were overweight, with a further 7.6% of these animals considered obese.3 In Great Britain, a study published in 2012 reported that 11.5% of 3227 cats were overweight or obese.4

As for people, obesity is linked to a range of disease states in pets, including orthopedic problems, diabetes mellitus, cardiopulmonary disease, urinary and reproductive disorders, neoplasia, and dermatologic disease.5

ONE HEALTH TACKLES OBESITY

These are worrying trends and the rising rates of obesity in people and their pets is a problem that falls firmly within the area of “One Health.” The One Health concept proposes that veterinarians, physicians, and other health care providers work together with scientists and social scientists to tackle shared human and animal disease problems in the context of the common environment in which we live. It is recognized that, underlying human obesity, there are complex medical, psychological, and socioeconomic factors, and that these factors may impact the relationships that people with obesity have with their companion animals.6 Solutions to the global problem of obesity must lie in a One Health approach and in developing healthier lifestyles for the human and animal members of the family.6

Addressing obesity in pets and their owners may be considered a significant public health role for the small animal practitioner.7

THE ONE HEALTH COMMITTEE

In 2010, the World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) established a One Health Committee (OHC) and its mission statement is: To ensure the prominence of the small companion animal–human interface in the global One Health agenda.

The committee works to promote three areas of One Health related to small companion animals: (1) the human–companion animal bond and the health benefits to people interacting with companion animals, (2) comparative and translational clinical research in companion animals for the benefit of both animal and human health, and (3) the importance of surveillance and control for zoonotic infectious diseases shared between people and companion animals.

The committee is made up of a group of veterinary and human medical experts in these fields, with representation from the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the One Health Office of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

ATTEND THE SYMPOSIUM

The OHC is currently working to present a two-day symposium that will showcase the comparative scientific and interlinked social aspects of human and pet animal obesity, and seek to identify One Health solutions to human and animal obesity problems. The symposium, titled Preventing Obesity in People and Their Pets: A One Health Approach, will take place this year in Atlanta, Georgia, November 10 to 11, and is being organized in association with the CDC and other educational partners.

The conference will promote the vision of a world where regular activity, a balanced diet, and healthy weight are part of every family’s life. Over the two days of this continuing education accredited event, human medical and veterinary experts will address the impact of obesity on clinical diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, type II diabetes, and cancer; the societal costs, behavior, and psychology of obesity; and practical One Health Solutions to obesity.

Further information and registration for the meeting can be found on our designated website, wsava-obesity.com. We strongly encourage any veterinarian with an interest in this important subject to register for the meeting.

—Michael J. Day
Chairman, WSAVA One Health Committee

References