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Declawing (Onychectomy)

NYSVMS Position:

Veterinarians take the issue of onychectomy (declawing) very seriously because it is considered a surgical procedure. They strive to educate pet owners of all available alternatives prior to discussing declawing. The NYSVMS strongly encourages client education prior to consideration of declawing, and believes the decision should be made by the owners in consultation with their veterinarian. Medical decisions should be left to the sound discretion of fully trained, licensed and state supervised veterinarians operating within appropriate standards of practice.

It is the veterinarian's obligation to consult with cat owners regarding normal scratching behavior of cats, the surgical procedure itself, and potential risks to the patient. Declawing of domestic cats should be considered only after attempts have been made to prevent the cat from using its claws destructively or when its clawing presents an above normal health risk for its owner(s). Scientific data indicates cats who possess destructive scratching behavior are more likely to be euthanized, abandoned, or relinquished into the shelter system. Despite the common argument that declawing can cause behavior changes in cats, numerous scientific studies showed no increase in behavior changes post-procedure. The NYSVMS position mirrors the position of the American Veterinary Medical Association.

Facts:

- Veterinarians strive to educate pet owners about all available alternatives prior to discussing declawing. Declawing should be available to pet owners as an option after exhausting other behavior modification options. It's better for the client to have surgery as a last alternative before resorting to euthanizing their cat or relinquishing to a shelter, where it's likely to be euthanized.
- Declawing is considered a surgical procedure. Veterinarians take any surgical procedure that relates to an animal's health very seriously.
- Clawing and scratching can be highly dangerous and detrimental to families with immunocompromised members. In this situation, declawing serves as a potential method to keep a much loved feline companion in a household versus relinquishing the family pet to a shelter where it may be euthanized.
- Scientific data shows cats that have destructive scratching behavior are more likely to be euthanized, abandoned, relinquished into the shelter system or released. Approximately 72% of cats relinquished to animal shelters are euthanized. Owners may feel they are faced with the choice of declawing their pet cat or potentially condemning it to death (AVMA).
- Current surgical methods are not the same as those methods made illegal in other countries.
- Veterinarians are trained to distinguish medical and behavioral problems and need to be able to continue to educate and counsel clients on this issue. Veterinarians are trained, licensed and state supervised professionals operating within appropriate standards of practice.
- When performed by a licensed, trained veterinarian, with proper anesthesia and multi modal pain control, there is no distinction between this procedure and any other surgical procedure done on cats.
- These procedures, when done properly, would not cut into the cat's sensitive foot pads.
- Despite the common argument that declawing can cause behavior changes in cats, numerous scientific studies show no increase in behavioral changes post-procedure.
- According to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) position statement: "Declawing of domestic cats should be considered only after attempts have been made to prevent the cat from using its claws destructively or when its clawing presents a zoonotic risk for its owner(s)."