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PRESS RELEASE
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Your Pet May be in Pain: September is Pain Awareness Month

*By the Vermont Veterinary Medical Association
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Animals suffer from pain, just like we do. Some forms of pain are obvious such as surgical pain or an acute injury. Because most of us have had surgery at some time in our lives (or know someone who has), we have an idea of the pain animals must feel after having an operation. The same holds true for an acute injury such as falling down the stairs or having an ear infection. Unfortunately, the majority of pain in animals is chronic and harder for most pet owners to detect. Arthritis is often misinterpreted as the pet “getting old” or “slowing down”. It is important to remember that age is not a disease, but pain is! Cancer and dental disease are chronic pains from which animals suffer in silence.

A common misconception is that animals will whine or cry out when they are in pain. In fact, it is very uncommon for this to occur. Signs of pain in dogs can vary between dog breeds and individual dogs. The majority have one or more of the following signs: decreased interaction with owners, decreased activity or appetite, reluctance to move, growling, guarding, aggression towards people or other pets, or even chewing or licking themselves where it hurts. For example, a dog may not want to be pet around the head if its ears or mouth hurt. An older dog with arthritis may growl or snap at kids or other dogs, trying to protect itself from being hurt.

Cats are very good at hiding when they don't feel well. This is because in the wild, if they show they are sick, they can quickly go from predator to prey. It is rare that a cat with chronic pain will cry out. Instead, it may stop grooming and have matted fur, be stiff, lose weight, hide, be less active, eat less, or groom excessively at an affected area. A cat who “doesn't like to be pet there” is usually painful at that location.

Dental pain is rarely obvious to most pet owners. The assumption by many is if the animal is eating there is no mouth pain. Since the alternative is to stop eating altogether and starve to death, even pets with very painful teeth will still eat. They just may not eat as much, may lose weight and may not chew their food well. They may chew only on one side of their mouth.

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A thorough annual wellness exam by your veterinarian will help to determine if your pet is in pain. If you suspect your pet is painful, call your veterinarian right away. There are many options available to treat pain in our pets: prescription medications, physical rehabilitation, acupuncture, laser therapy and therapeutic massage. Remember do not ever give human pain relievers to your pet: the majority of them are toxic to our pets. Even a little bit of certain human pain medications can cause kidney failure and death in our pets.

It is our moral responsibility as pet owners to provide for all aspects of our pets' needs. They give us unconditional love and depend on us for their care and comfort. Besides giving them food, love, and shelter we must realize that they may get sick and will definitely get old. Along the way there are times they will be in pain, for which there is help. For more information about pain control and how to tell if your pet is in pain, talk to your veterinarian and go to www.ivapm.org, the website of the International Veterinary Academy of Pain Management.

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The Vermont Veterinary Medical Association (VVMA) is a professional organization of 350 veterinarians dedicated to compassionate animal care and quality medicine. For more information, visit www.vtvets.org or call (802) 878-6888.