



Bill 70
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COSMETIC ALTERATION – POSITION STATEMENT

January 27, 2014

Position

"The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA) opposes the alteration of any animal by surgical or other invasive methods for cosmetic or competitive purposes."

Background

1. The CVMA believes that all veterinarians have an ethical obligation to act in the best medical and welfare interests of their patients. The veterinary oath states, "*I will strive to promote animal health and welfare, relieve animal suffering,...*". (1)

2. The CVMA believes that cosmetic alteration is unnecessary. Surgical alterations in cases of injury or for reasons of health are not considered cosmetic.

a) Examples of cosmetic surgical procedures include:

- tail docking in the canine or equine (2)
- ear cropping in canines

The CVMA strongly encourages breed associations to change their breed standards so that cosmetic surgeries are not required and to assist the veterinary community in educating the public that these procedures cause unnecessary pain and suffering (3).

b) Non-surgical alteration for cosmetic purposes includes:

- cosmetic dentistry to meet show or breed standards
- tattooing other than for registration and identification
- body piercing

3. There are many countries that do not permit cosmetic surgeries on dogs (4,5) and their associated breed registries allow dogs to compete and be shown in their natural state (6,7). Currently, in Canada, veterinarians in 6 provinces are prohibited from performing various cosmetic surgeries through provincial veterinary association by-laws and codes of practice (NL, PE, NS, NB, MB, SK). In addition, cosmetic surgery is illegal under the provincial *Animal Health and Protection Act* in Newfoundland and Labrador.

4. There is no scientific evidence that cosmetic surgeries provide any welfare or medical benefit to animals (8-10). There is evidence to suggest that some cosmetic procedures

cause acute and chronic pain (9-12), as well as behavioural evidence that cosmetic alteration may be detrimental to canine behavior (10,13). In one study using a small dataset from Great Britain, it was found that there was a decrease in risk of tail injuries for docked dogs (0.03%) compared with non-docked dogs (0.23%). The very low incidence of tail injuries in all groups, however, shows that tail docking does not provide sufficient protection against injury to justify tail docking of all animals (according to this study, it would require 500 tail-dockings to prevent 1 injury) (9).

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