

# Veterinary update

**BCSPCA**  
SPEAKING FOR ANIMALS

Dear Colleagues,

We hope this finds you healthy and well. I want to take the opportunity to inform you of some of the changes our sheltering branches have undertaken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Likely similar to your own practice operations, this has been a period of intense adaptation as we learn how to continue serving our communities, especially the most vulnerable animals and people. Some of these adjustments we consider “COVID Keepers” – positive changes we plan to continue going forward. Others are unavoidable compromises we are anxious to be rid of as soon as possible.

First and foremost, let’s talk about elective surgery. On April 1 this year, the BC Chief Veterinary Officer recommended that veterinarians practicing in B.C. temporarily suspend elective spay/neuter and all other non-essential services in order to reduce transmission of COVID-19 and preserve PPE for the human medical field. To comply, we had to temporarily suspend our 100 per cent pre-adoption spay/neuter while still moving animals into homes. For two months, we adopted out intact animals with spay/neuter certificates that could be redeemed for the cost of the surgery when services resumed. Adopters were given information about what to expect when living with an intact animal (available from [spca.bc.ca/for-shelters](https://spca.bc.ca/for-shelters)), and signed waivers committing to having their new pet spayed or neutered once provincial direction changed.

On May 20, the CVBC released guidelines for resuming non-essential clinical services, and we began sending animals for spay/neuter surgeries again. However, in many B.C. communities, there is a significant surgery backlog. We have not yet been able to return to 100 per cent pre-adoption spay/neuter, but in the coming months that is our goal. Spay/neuter certificates are being used only in communities where surgery backlogs still exist.

Up until recently, public access to our sheltering branches was limited to pre-booked appointments. As part of the provincial government’s next phase of re-opening, however, our facilities have now resumed regular public hours of operation. Appointments are still preferred in order to maintain our occupancy limits and serve people as efficiently as possible. We encourage all visitors to wear masks when entering our facilities and to respect the physical distancing directions in place. SARS-CoV-2 can be transmitted to, and between, some species of companion animals. We follow protocols from the CDC, AVMA and shelter medicine experts for segregation of incoming animals who have been exposed, as well as for managing overall on-site capacity to reduce animal transmission risk.

Fostering has always been a vital resource for animals in our care, but this year more than ever we are thankful for our foster volunteers. Keeping animals in foster homes prevents our staff and volunteers from having to congregate in shelters to provide daily care, and also provides better welfare for most animals.

With so many animals in foster care and limited public access to our facilities, our shelters have gone virtual! Potential adopters can now submit applications online. If they are a good fit, staff will follow up to book meet-and-greet appointments in person or through streaming video. Online adoption applications are definitely a “COVID Keeper” – this format has streamlined our adoption process and increased access for adopters who would otherwise not be able to visit the branch.



Thank you for your continued support during this challenging time,

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### Do you have questions or feedback for the BC SPCA?

Please email us at [outreach@spca.bc.ca](mailto:outreach@spca.bc.ca)

*The British Columbia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (BC SPCA) is a not-for-profit organization reliant on donations from the public.*



## BC SPCA celebrates 125 year anniversary

2020 marks a milestone for B.C.'s oldest animal charity as the BC SPCA celebrates 125 years of rescuing and protecting animals.

The BC SPCA came into existence because of the mistreatment of horses who were being used to haul heavy materials in B.C.'s booming construction economy at the turn of the 20th century. A small group of clergy, journalists and businessmen concerned about the abuse of these horses successfully lobbied the government to create laws to protect animals in 1895 and the BC SPCA was created as part of that legislation (later amended to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act) as a body to enforce the laws.

From its early beginnings as an advocacy group the BC SPCA has grown to become one of the largest animal welfare organizations of its kind in North America.

Our work would not be possible without our veterinary partners throughout the province. We want to thank you for being part of this journey and making this life-saving work possible.

## Meet Dr. Hatley McMicking, General Manager, Veterinary Hospital Services

Dr. McMicking completed her veterinary degree at Western University of Health Sciences in the U.S. With a keen interest in veterinary business, she began her career practicing small animal medicine while also consulting on special projects for small to medium-sized businesses. Finding a niche in medical technology, Dr. McMicking pursued an alternative pathway that landed her in human healthcare for a number of years.

She's thrilled to return to "the fun side" of medicine full-time and bring back to the veterinary profession what she has learned.

### What is your role at the BC SPCA?

I provide leadership to our five practices across the province: two spay/neuter clinics in Kamloops and Prince George, and three full-service hospitals in Burnaby, Penticton and Vancouver. I also collaborate with other departments to develop and implement organization-wide veterinary initiatives.

### What did you learn working outside of the veterinary profession that excites you most?

While working with rural communities and diverse populations across the world, I became particularly focused on the role language and literacy play in effective communications. Communication is critical to ensuring successful patient outcomes, yet more than 60 per cent of Canadians do not fully understand or know how to communicate about their medical care<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *A vision for a Health Literate Canada*, Irving Rootman, Deborah Gordon-El-Bihbey

Taking a history and providing care instructions were two places I frequently saw health illiteracy contributing to communication breakdowns, so I sought opportunities in human healthcare actively working to address these issues.

Digital health provides a wealth of tools to bridge care gaps in our profession. In human medicine, a doctor can instantly communicate in over 50 languages with the patient using a multilingual telemedicine platform. This is a game changer for improving access to care, and it's surprisingly cost-effective. I would love to see our profession embrace telemedicine so that we can invest in digital tools such as virtual translation services.

### What else can help address gaps caused by health illiteracy?

A great place to start is assessing the language used in forms and discharge instructions. Could an eight-year-old understand it? Are there places where language can't be adjusted to a fifth-grade reading level and pictures may help? Also, providing history questions before the exam may allow someone to gather their thoughts and feel more comfortable communicating at the time of the appointment.



## Dr. Bobsien wins 2020 Humane Award

The BC SPCA congratulates Dr. Bettina Bobsien on a well-deserved honour: receiving the CVMA's 2020 Humane Award. The CVMA Humane Award, sponsored by Merck Animal Health, was established in 1986 and recognizes leadership in the care and well-being of animals.

Dr. Bobsien led the CVBC Animal Welfare Committee for four years and her work resulted in important bans on canine ear cropping and tail docking as well as feline declawing. She has helped the BC SPCA with many cases and served as a consultant in barn design and developing training materials for our Cruelty Investigations Department. She also provided expertise to the development of the national Equine and Beef Codes of Practice. Dr. Bobsien's work has contributed immeasurably to improving animal welfare and elevating the veterinary profession in Canada and beyond, and we are incredibly fortunate to have her here in B.C.!

## BC SPCA work leads to discovery of new feline virus

As part of our current Strategic Plan, the BC SPCA is committed to investing in research that advances animal welfare, including in the area of shelter medicine. Our Animal Health team recently published two peer-reviewed infectious disease papers.

The first, *Virome of a Feline Outbreak of Diarrhea and Vomiting Includes Bocaviruses and a Novel Chapparravirus*, describes the discovery of a novel feline virus associated with an outbreak of vomiting and diarrhea that affected three BC SPCA facilities in the winter of 2018-2019. The pattern of the outbreak fit with a viral pathogen, but extensive testing using commercially available diagnostic tests did not identify a cause.

Using foundational outbreak investigation and management methods, our team characterized the epidemiology of the outbreak while simultaneously implementing measures to successfully resolve it. We also saved frozen samples for a research partnership. These were analyzed by Idexx Laboratories, then subjected to a molecular approach called viral metagenomics by the University of California, San Francisco and a novel chapparravirus called fechavirus was identified. Distinct from the familiar feline parvovirus that causes panleukopenia, this new virus requires more study to understand if it can be a causative agent of feline enteric disease.

The second, *Descriptive epidemiology of companion animal dermatophytosis in a Canadian Pacific Northwest animal shelter system*, reviewed records from 80,471 incoming BC SPCA shelter animals over a 3.5-year period. Ringworm is a serious problem in sheltered animals, but no publications on prevalence and risk factors for ringworm had been done in any Canadian shelter system.

We found that the overall prevalence was much lower than in other studies, at only 0.25 per cent for *Microsporum canis* and 0.055 per cent for *Trichophyton spp.* There were no dogs with *M. canis*, only cats and rabbits. Cats were twice as likely as dogs to be diagnosed with *Trichophyton*. Puppies and kittens (vs. adults) and animals from cruelty investigations (vs. other sources) were significantly more likely to be diagnosed with dermatophytosis. Understanding that ringworm is very rare here, but more likely in cruelty (hoarding) cases should lead practitioners to inquire about histories in animals presented with this disease, in case they trace back to a larger population.

Interested in a free, RACE-approved CE webinar to learn more about fechavirus and outbreak management lessons learned from the outbreak? [spca.bc.ca/events/event/discovery-of-novel-fechavirus/](https://spca.bc.ca/events/event/discovery-of-novel-fechavirus/)

## UBC and BC SPCA launch new research chair to study companion animals

In partnership with the University of British Columbia, the BC SPCA has created a new research chair to improve the lives of companion animals.

Dr. Protopopova, an assistant professor in UBC's Faculty of Land and Food Systems, has done extensive research to improve the welfare of companion animals and those who care for them. Now Protopopova has been named the NSERC/BC SPCA Industrial Research Chair in Animal Welfare, and she will lead research between UBC and the BC SPCA over the next five years.

"Companion animals face critical issues related to optimal housing in animal shelters, rehabilitation and adoption following cruelty or neglect, import of rescue animals, and in various other human-animal interaction contexts," says Protopopova. "I'll be working with the scientific community, professionals in non-profit organizations and the companion animal industry to discover new ways we can improve the lives of companion animals."

The new program will combine research, public education and outreach and will be integrated into the faculty's established and renowned Animal Welfare Program, which was first created in 1997 with help of the BC SPCA.



## Gratitude to Dr. Jane Pritchard

The BC SPCA extends our warm gratitude and best wishes to Dr. Jane Pritchard, who retired in March as the province's Chief Veterinary Officer.

Dr. Pritchard is a true believer in the role of veterinarians in protecting animal welfare. Her dedication and incredible collaborative work on behalf of all types of animals in B.C. are unmatched. We wish her the best in her interim position with the CVBC and in the years beyond.

BC SPCA Chief Prevention and Enforcement Officer Marcie Moriarty reflects: "It was a pleasure to work with Jane over the years on a variety of animal welfare priority issues. Whether it was discussing how to better meet the needs of cruelty investigations and necropsy reports, to cross-training opportunities and government policy and legislation regarding animal issues, Jane brought passion, understanding and intelligence to the table. She will be sorely missed!"

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## Connecting dog guardians with humane dog trainers

How often does a client come to you asking for training advice for their new puppy, or what to do about behaviour challenges with their dogs?

Dog training is unregulated in B.C., which means anyone can sell their services as a trainer. Finding the right trainer to refer to can be difficult. The BC SPCA's AnimalKind program can help. We have a list of training businesses that use science-based humane dog training methods and have been audited by us.

Part of our services includes providing dog guardians with information about the benefits of science-based, humane dog training and connecting them to AnimalKind-accredited trainers. We count on our referral partners to help us achieve that. Veterinary clinics are among our most valuable partners. Staff and veterinarians are trusted members of their communities who provide professional advice to families with pets. With your help, more dog guardians will learn about humane dog training and the AnimalKind program.

### Here to help!

We have informative rack cards available that serve as material to hand out at your veterinary clinic. They are free, and we will ship them at no cost to you! Email [rackcards@animalkind.ca](mailto:rackcards@animalkind.ca) to request a package.

Together we will improve the welfare of dogs and their families.

## Research by graduate student boosts knowledge for shelter animals

Traditionally, much of the scientific literature on shelter cat welfare has focused on cage size and setup. Recognizing that studies on the broader shelter environment were lacking, Bailey Eagan, a Master's student in the UBC Animal Welfare Program, assessed how sound affects the behaviour of shelter cats. Eagan studied the sources and levels of noise that cats are exposed to day and night in a high volume BC SPCA shelter in the Lower Mainland.

Her research revealed that AM periods are much noisier than PM periods, and cats show significantly more fear and less maintenance behaviour in the AM than the PM. During noise transitions – when the shelter is quiet and dogs suddenly start to bark, for instance – cats also show significantly more fear after the sound begins. Taken together, these results suggest that lowering noise levels in shelters may help improve cat welfare.

Dr. Emilia Gordon, a veterinarian who manages the BC SPCA's provincial shelter medicine program, serves on Eagan's graduate committee. Eagan will be defending her thesis this summer.

