Update on Cat Declawing in Canada: *The times they are a-changin’*

Alice Crook, DVM
Outline

- Brief background
- CVMA, AVMA, AAFP statements
- Provincial regulations
- Veterinary bylaws vs animal health acts
- Humane Canada™ — new position statement
Terminology

- What is it? Removal of P3 of each digit; typically front paws
- Common term: feline declawing
- Onychectomy – technical term
- CVMA – Partial digital amputation
- AVMA, AAFP – “declawing (onychectomy)”
Why we should NOT declaw cats

- Scratching is a normal behaviour in cats
- Many viable alternatives to PDA to address unwanted scratching behaviour
- Surgical amputation of P3:
  - Alters normal behaviour
  - Causes avoidable short-term acute pain
  - Potential to cause chronic pain & negative long term behavioural consequences\(^1\)
  - Normal risks associated with GA & surgery

1. Martell-Moran NK et al. 2018. Pain and adverse behaviour in declawed cats
Woodrow “Woody” Hamilton Hurnik
(Soft Paws Nail Caps)

Smee Crook
Arguments cited in favour of declawing

• “It is a necessary option for immunocompromised people.”
• **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:** recommendations re preventing opportunistic infections (variety of agents): include recommendations for pet owners—declawing is not a recommended strategy because ↑ biting behaviour—↑ risk of infection compared to cat scratches

  • [Https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/pets/cats.html](https://www.cdc.gov/healthypets/pets/cats.html)
• “Cats will be relinquished if declawing not an option.”
• No peer-reviewed studies show higher rate of relinquishment of cats with intact claws vs declawed cats
• ↑ risk of unwanted behaviours (biting, inappropriate elimination) that may lead to relinquishment
AVMA policy

“The American VMA strongly encourages client education prior to consideration of onychectomy (declawing). It is the obligation of the veterinarian to provide cat owners with a complete education with regard to the normal scratching behavior of cats, the procedure itself, as well as potential risks to the patient. Onychectomy is an amputation and should be regarded as a major surgery. The decision to declaw a cat should be made by the owners in consultation with their veterinarian. 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).”
AAFP policy

• “The American Association of Feline Practitioners (AAFP) strongly opposes declawing (onychectomy) as an elective procedure. It is the obligation of veterinarians to provide cat owners with alternatives to declawing. If owners are considering declawing, they must be provided with complete education about feline declawing.”

• Download - Client Brochure
  Access - Scratching Education Resources
  Access Client Resources on catfriendly.com
CVMA 2017 “The Canadian Veterinary Medical Association opposes elective & non-therapeutic Partial Digital Amputation (PDA), commonly known as declawing or onychectomy, of domestic cats.”

“3. Veterinarians strive to use their scientific knowledge to promote animal health and welfare and relieve animal suffering in keeping with the principles of veterinary medical ethics (1). With or without concrete scientific evidence, ethical consideration has to be given to the welfare of the animal. Veterinarians need to consider what advantages non-medically driven PDA’s offer to the feline. Viable alternatives to PDAs exist. Therefore from an ethical viewpoint, the CVMA views this surgery as unacceptable as it offers no advantage to the feline and the lack of scientific evidence leaves us unable to predict the likelihood of long-term behavioural and physical negative side effects.”
Legislation: international & North America

• Declawing cats is banned in the UK, Europe, Australia, Japan, Brazil, several California cities.
• See The Paw Project for North American updates & resources
• Canada: provincial veterinary regulatory bodies or animal health acts (or both)
Timeline in Canada

- Pre 2017: Various motions to ban discussed by VMAs; individual clinic policies
- March 2017: Revised CVMA Position Statement opposes PDA
- December 2017 AGM: NSVMA bans procedure as of March 2018
- May 2018: CVBC bans PDA
- November 3, 2018 AGMs: PEIVMA and NL CV ban PDAs at their AGMs (NL effective Jan. 1, 2019)
- February 2019: ABVMA recommended banning unnecessary medical/surgical procedures, including PDAs
Other provinces

- NB VMA: proposed at October 2018 AGM, wording issues (*stay tuned for 2019 AGM*)

- What’s up with **Ontario**?
  - “OVMA’s Board of Directors recently endorsed the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association’s statement on Partial Digital Amputation (PDA), which opposes elective and nontherapeutic PDA, commonly known as declawing."
  
  - “The adoption of a position opposing elective and non-therapeutic PDA by OVMA and CVMA does not impact Ontario veterinarians’ ability to continue to perform declaws on their feline patients. However, it is hoped the Associations’ stance will assist veterinarians who are reluctant to perform this procedure to speak to their clients about alternatives. OVMA has also shared this new position statement with the College of Veterinarians of Ontario.”

- Many clinics won’t declaw, but many still do.
Veterinary bylaws or animal health acts?

- E.g., Alberta Resolutions 19-I & 19-II passed Feb. 24, 2019: Members of the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association *recommended* a ban on *medically unnecessary procedures* for animals, such as declawing and cosmetic surgery—passed with overwhelming support.

- Approved resolutions forwarded to the Government of Alberta requesting the amendments to the Veterinary Profession General Regulation—a slow process!

- ABVMA Council to consider draft policy re unnecessary medical procedures at meeting Apr. 24-25, expected to be in place by summer (to reflect the intent of resolutions until the government implements the proposed changes).
27 (1) No person shall perform, or permit to be performed, cosmetic surgery on an animal unless it is an accepted activity under Section 28.

(2) Cosmetic surgery means surgery performed solely for the purpose of altering the appearance of an animal, without a medical benefit, and includes the following, including any similar alterations:
(a) tail docking;
(b) tail nicking, setting or blocking;
(c) ear cropping;
(d) devocalization or debarking;
(e) onychectomy (declawing);
(f) dewclaw removal;
(g) any other prescribed alteration or surgery.

28 Notwithstanding Section 27, the following accepted activities regarding surgery or alterations to an animal do not contravene this Act:
(a) surgery performed by a veterinarian to treat an injury or disease of an animal or for other medical reasons determined by a veterinarian to be necessary or beneficial to the health of the animal;
(b) agricultural practices carried out in accordance with the National Farm Animal Care Council codes of practice or any other codes of practice prescribed by the regulations.
Summary @ Apr. 14, 2019--Canada

- PDA banned in NS, BC, PEI, NL
- Very likely this year in AB, NB (next Manitoba, Quebec?)
- VCA hospitals (93 across Canada) “Canada's largest group of vet hospitals follows BC and Nova Scotia in banning cat declawing” (May 2018)
- Québec: Globalvet (15 clinics): Fini le dégriffage des chats dans plusieurs cliniques du Québec (as of January 2019)
- Many individual clinics (eg Atlantic Veterinary College Hospital)
Humane Canada™ —proposed position

Medically Unnecessary Procedures

- replaces positions on cosmetic surgery & declawing
- “Humane Canada™ is opposed to the alteration of companion animals by surgical or other invasive methods for cosmetic reasons, competitive reasons or behavioural reasons, except procedures performed by a licensed veterinarian to alleviate suffering, or for reasons of welfare. This includes surgical procedures such as tail docking, ear cropping, piercing, devocalization and declawing (partial digital amputation).”
- Informed by BCSPCA, OHS, and CVMA statements & prov. legislation
Humane Canada™ — Background

- “Such procedures do not benefit the animal and are detrimental to the animal’s health and welfare. As with any surgery, these procedures also expose the animal to the risk of anaesthetic and other possible complications.

- Spaying and neutering, as well as permanent identification for the purpose of returning lost animals to their guardians, are exempted from this position due to the associated welfare benefits to individual animals and overall community animal management.

- Humane Canada™ encourages breed associations to change their breed standards so that cosmetic procedures are not required.

- Partial digital amputation (also known as declawing) is the surgical removal of the third phalanx of each digit. Non-therapeutic PDA is generally performed for the convenience of the owner to eliminate the ability of a cat to cause damage from scratching. However, declawing cats can result in unnecessary and avoidable acute and chronic pain and adverse behavioural effects. It is the responsibility of cat owners to become educated on the subject of declawing and its alternatives.”
Understand that most cats are pessimists—they assume the worst will happen. Try not to confirm it for them.

Dr. Kim Kendall, Australia
Game changing study!


- Retrospective study to examine impact of onychectomy on subsequent development of back pain & unwanted behaviours

- Stay tuned 😊
Legislation: international & North America

• Declawing cats is banned in the U.K., Europe, Australia and several California cities.

• Canada: provincial veterinary regulatory bodies? or animal health acts?

• Eg. NS Bill 27 amendment to Animal Protection Act (3rd reading Oct. 2018)

  (1) No person shall perform, or permit to be performed, cosmetic surgery...

  (2) Cosmetic surgery means performed solely for altering appearance of an animal, without medical benefit, ... includes tails, ears, dewclaws, onychectomy & devocalization
No Member of the Nova Scotia Veterinary Medical Association shall perform the elective and non-therapeutic Partial Digital Amputation (PDA), commonly known as declawing or onychectomy, of domestic cats. The NSVMA views elective and non-therapeutic PDA as ethically unacceptable.

However, the NSVMA does recognize that appropriate medical therapy may necessitate PDA surgery, that includes but is not limited to, biopsy of a nail or phalanx or surgery to treat the following:

-- neoplasia of nail bed or phalanges, severe or irreversible trauma, immune-mediated disease affecting nail bed, paronychia (inflammation or infection), onychodystrophy (abnormal formation), onychogryphosis (hypertrophy and abnormal curvature),

Definitions: onychomadesis (sloughing), onychomalacia (softening), onychomycosis (fungal infection), or onychoschizia (splitting).
College of Veterinarians of BC; effective May 8, 2018

Professional Practice Standard: Feline Partial Digit Amputation / Declawing

No registrant may perform elective and non-therapeutic Partial Digit Amputation, otherwise known as declawing or onychectomy, of any felid, including domestic cats.

The CVBC recognizes that elective and non-therapeutic declawing is ethically unacceptable and that it is not an appropriate means of dealing with feline behaviour issues.

However, the CVBC acknowledges that there are medical conditions that may necessitate partial or full digit amputation of some or all digits as an appropriate medical therapy. Such conditions include, but are not limited to:

No medical conditions or environmental circumstances of the cat owner justify the declawing of domestic cats.
No member of the Prince Edward Island Veterinary Medical Association shall perform elective, i.e. non-therapeutic, partial digital amputation (PDA), commonly known as declawing or onychectomy, of domestic cats.

The PEIVMA recognizes that appropriate medical therapy may necessitate PDA surgery. Medically necessary PDA surgery may include, but is not restricted to, biopsy of a nail or phalanx or surgery to treat neoplasia of nail bed or phalanges, severe or irreversible trauma, immune-mediated disease affecting nail bed, paronychia (inflammation or infection), onychodystrophy (abnormal formation), onychogryphosis (hypertrophy and abnormal curvature), onychomadesis (sloughing), onychomalacia (softening), onychomycosis (fungal infection), or onychoschizia (splitting). If exceptional circumstances exist, the veterinarian may make application to the PEIVMA council, with supporting evidence, for authorization to perform this procedure.
NL College of Veterinarians

- Feline Onychectomy by-law (passed Nov. 2018, effective Jan. 1, 2019):
  - No registrant may perform elective and non-therapeutic Partial Digit Amputation, otherwise known as declawing or onychectomy, of any felid, including domestic cats.
Game changing study!

- Retrospective study to examine impact of onychectomy on subsequent development of back pain & unwanted behaviours
- 137 declawed & 137 non-declawed cats (50% owned/shelter in each group); cats with UTI or known previous trauma excluded
- Last 2 year of medical hx wrt documented biting, inappropriate elimination
- All cats physically examined for pain (AAHA Pain Management Guidelines) and barbering
- All cats radiographed: reviewed by radiologist who was unaware of individual hx & physical findings; evaluated for P3 remnants, osteoarthritis, visible remodelling of P2
Martell-Moran study 2018: results

- Overall: Declawed vs non-declawed had significant increases in the odds of:
  - Back pain (OR 2.9)
  - Biting (OR 4.5)
  - Periuria/perichezia (OR 7.2)
  - Barbering (OR 3.6)
- Of the 137 declawed cats, 63% showed radiographic evidence of residual P3 fragments (!): above ORs were significantly increased in declawed cats with retained P3 fragments compared to those without
- Even with optimal technique, there is increased risk of back pain and adverse behaviours