Pain Management: A Win, Win Situation for You, Your Patients, and Your Clients
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- Historically, it was believed animals did not feel pain or perceived pain differently than did humans. An example of a misconception regarding post-operative pain in animal patients was that pain following surgery benefited animals because it limited movement thus preventing further injury.
- Animals and humans share similar anatomical and physiological nociceptive structures for the production, conduction, and modulation of pain.
- Pain assessment in animals is based on anthropomorphic comparisons, subjective, and objective criteria.

Ethical principles of pain management in veterinary medicine
- The Veterinarian’s Oath states, “…the protection of animal health and welfare, the prevention and relief of animal suffering…” Does the Veterinarian’s Oath still apply today?
- Since recorded history humans have consistently demonstrated a keenness toward domesticating and caring for animals. Unfortunately, the historical relationship between humans and animals is tainted with various forms of animal cruelty.
- Modern biology presented similarities between humans and animals, thus proving animals were not distinct from humans.
- Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution transformed the perception of the relationship between animals and humans.
- In United States, the 1966 Animal Welfare Act and The National Institutes of Health Reauthorization Acts set the stage for social, economic, and legislative actions leading to the modernization of the concept of animal welfare.
- As modern medicine became more scientifically based, pain, although always recognized as an entity of pathology, was difficult to accept because it never completely had a scientific explanation.
- Veterinary medicine was founded originally to benefit the animal agricultural industry and military use of horses. Anesthesia and analgesia were primarily means to help control large animals, protect personnel, and the value of the patient.
- Although human medicine has made tremendous advancements in pain management veterinary medicine still lags behind.
- Society’s views of animal pain and welfare have changed dramatically since the Animal Welfare Act was passed in 1966. Today, society no longer tolerates unnecessary animal suffering. The ease of information from the world-wide internet allows people to self-educate on subjects in pet health and welfare. Clients no longer consider pain management options as a luxury for their pet but instead as a mandatory part of an overall procedure.
- Two primary factors that will contribute to the veterinary industry losing significance in society are refusal to change and refusal to charge. Each one of us, as a representative of the veterinary industry, has an obligation to remain educated regarding pet health issues (including pain management), and be the primary source of information about pet welfare for clients, and clients have an obligation to realize financially the importance of veterinarians’ expertise in the health and welfare of their pets.

References
ACVAA website: http://www.acvaa.org, American College of Veterinary Anesthesiologists’ position paper on the treatment of pain in animals, 2006 http://www.acvaa.org/docs/Pain_Treatment