

RMB Newsletter Vol 7:4 Veterinary Students Debate Pet Diets

Dear Reader,

As I write 2008 is but a few hours away. Where did 2007 go? It's true that time flies when you're having fun. It flies by when you get older too.

In December 2006 the Three Part Test edition of the RMB Newsletter was published

<http://seureshop.rawmeatybones.com/newsletter/view.epl?id=44>

A year on I reckon it's just as relevant. Do take a look if you get chance.

Given that junk pet food is the single most important trigger for the epidemics of disease affecting our pet carnivores, a visitor from Mars (the planet) might reasonably expect that pet health and welfare professionals would give the matter top priority. How might we explain to our Martian visitor that the diet scandal is definitely not top priority and seldom on the agenda?

Occasionally, though, the subject of diets for carnivores gets an airing in the veterinary arena. You have to be quick and you have to be in the right place to hear what's said.

In this edition of the RMB Newsletter I mention the recent vet student debate about pet diets and the subsequent Veterinary Record coverage and non-coverage. This way, at least we have a bench mark against which we can judge future progress.

I also take this opportunity to thank all those who have sent me their observations and kind words throughout this past year. Thank you for your wonderful support.

There's much to be done and it's so good to see so many putting their shoulders to the wheel.

Wishing you and yours a wonderful, healthy,

Happy New Year,

Tom Lonsdale

Veterinary Students Debate Pet Diets

The UK and Ireland vet students debate audio tracks are at:
www.srcf.ucam.org/~ac411

Congratulations to UK vets Roger Meacock, Richard Allport and Tom Harcourt-Brown for scoring good points that clearly influenced the vet student audience.

‘Know thine enemy’ Accordingly I encourage you to listen to the vet academic, the Past President of the British Small Animal Veterinary Association and the animal welfare group vet spinning their disinformation in support of junk pet food.

If we are to counter these people we need to hear and understand how they misuse language, distort information and abuse their positions of power and trust.

Veterinary Record report

The Veterinary Record, journal of the British Veterinary Association reported on the debate in the 3 November 2007 edition:

Diets on the menu for AVS debate

'THIS house believes vets should advocate feeding manufactured pet foods.'

This was the motion debated at a meeting organised by the Association of Veterinary Students (AVS) at Cambridge University on October 24.

Explaining what had prompted the debate, the AVS's Cambridge representative, Mr Alex Corbishley, said that the relationship between veterinary surgeons and pet food manufacturers was receiving increasing public attention. He said that although it was the opinion of the AVS that pet food nutrition teaching in the veterinary schools was excellent and unbiased, sponsorship in this area by pet food manufacturers had left nutritional teaching open to accusations of bias.

Three speakers were scheduled to speak in support of the motion and three against. Those opposing the motion argued that a nutritionally sound alternative to commercial pet food was provided by raw meaty bones, home-prepared meals or plant material.

Arguments for

Giving a presentation in support of the motion on behalf of Dr Marge Chandler, who was unable to attend, Mr Chris Laurence, veterinary director of the Dogs Trust, said that, unlike the situation with commercial pet food, there had been no controlled feeding research trials performed for home-made diets. While it was possible to make a home-made diet that was complete and balanced, many did not meet the published nutritional requirements that had been formulated through decades of research. In two published studies by independent researchers, who were unconnected to the pet food industry, home-made diets did not meet official requirements for, among others, calcium and phosphorus, and had low levels of nutrients such as zinc, iron and manganese; other diets had excessive levels of vitamin D, manganese and zinc.

Commercial food helped to reduce the incidence of food poisoning; raw food had a higher risk of containing bacterial toxins and pathogenic protozoa. Studies had shown that 69 per cent of cats fed a raw meat diet were seropositive for Toxoplasma species, compared with just over 19 per cent of those fed commercial or cooked food. Pets shedding these organisms could provide a health risk to humans. With a raw meaty bones diet there was also the risk of bones obstructing and perforating the intestinal tract.

Also arguing in support of the motion, Mr Mike Jessop, a practitioner from Merthyr Tydfil, said that the increasing use of commercial diets had been a major advance in improving general animal health. He strongly believed that abandoning commercial foods would significantly increase the incidence of gastrointestinal disease, salmonella and broken teeth. 'From a veterinary business aspect that has some plus points, but from a welfare aspect it's appalling.'

He argued that even if there were ready supplies of food to feed the nation's pets, modern society did not have the time to spend preparing nutritionally balanced meals for its pets. He also argued that the high quality of modern pet food was extending the lifespan of pets. 'We see longer-living healthy pets', he said. One could regulate food intake much more easily with a commercial diet, which helped to control obesity. He added that there was a spectrum of quality in the commercial diet range and this was reflected in the price banding. He said that the veterinary profession should be behind the super premium end of the market as this would encourage science and evolution and raise the standards of all commercial pet food.

Giving his own views in support of the motion, Mr Laurence looked at how the argument was influenced by the provisions of the new Animal Welfare Act 2006, which imposes a duty of care on all animal owners and the need to provide a 'suitable diet'. It was impractical to expect that the average owner could perform any sort of analysis on unprepared food; for example, how much fat and protein was in a piece of meat. Furthermore, feeding an animal an unbalanced diet that resulted in a nutritional disease might result in an offence of causing 'unnecessary suffering' being committed.

The Dogs Trust used prepared food as it was practical, consistent and reduced the incidence of nutritionally induced diarrhoea. Logistically, he said, the trust could not feed raw meat to dogs, as it would be unable to guarantee to trustees that the dogs were being fed a nutritionally balanced diet.

Arguments against

Arguing against the motion, Mr Roger Meacock, a referral veterinary surgeon based in Swindon, said that cats and dogs should be fed raw meaty bones as they were carnivores and not, as generally thought, omnivores. He pointed to the dogs' dentition, mastication action and lack of a fermentation area for plant material as evidence of its carnivore status.

He was not advocating a 'willy-nilly' diet - it should be appropriate to the species and comparable to what the animal would have in the wild. What dogs and cats needed was a wide variety of foods, for example, chicken one week and rabbit the next. Dogs were also able to dissolve bones in their stomachs.

What did a raw meaty bone diet offer a cat or dog that a commercial diet did not? He said that it helped clean their teeth much more effectively than kibble, chews or any toothbrush.

Animals also gained satisfaction from chewing and crunching their food, which led to better behaviour. It also resulted in defecation being slightly more difficult, which helped to squeeze the anal glands and thus reduced anal gland problems.

Mr Richard Allport, from a referral practice based in Potter's Bar, argued that the pet food industry was motivated largely by money. He also argued that commercial cat and dog pet foods contained too much carbohydrate because this tended to be cheaper. Why did manufacturers

not produce more high-protein diets? A study had shown that diabetic cats were significantly more likely to revert to a non-insulin-dependent state when given low-carbohydrate, low-fibre foods.

Also speaking against the motion, Mr Tom Harcourt-Brown, a resident at Cambridge veterinary school, focused on rabbits where, he said, the arguments 'are pretty clear cut'. He said that most rabbit problems seen in practice were dental related. Research dating from the mid-1990s had shown that dental problems were largely caused by an inappropriate diet, and that low calcium and vitamin D levels led to dental disease. Rabbits were adapted to eat high volumes of low-quality food and, in the past, low volumes of high-quality food provided by pet food manufacturers had led to behavioural and dental problems.

Grass and other vegetation growing at the side of the road provided rabbits with all their nutritional needs. There were arguments not to feed grass, mainly convenience: people did not want to pick their rabbits' food. Another argument was that there was no money to be made from grass. However, he said: 'There is only evidence to say that we shouldn't be feeding them manufactured food.'

After the debate, a vote was taken by a show of hands among those present; the motion was carried by a small majority.

Letter for publication

Seeing the apparent willingness of the Veterinary Record and Veterinary Times to send reporters to cover the Cambridge University debate and given that Past President of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, Professor Sheila Crispin, had attended the debate, I thought it worth attempting to widen discussion.

On 5 November 2007 I submitted a letter for publication in the Veterinary Record and Veterinary Times. Full credit to the Veterinary Times, the commercial, independent publication; they published the letter in the 3 December 2007 edition.

As is their custom the Veterinary Record did not publish the letter. Mr Martin Alder the editor was on holiday when I rang to ask why yet again the journal of the British Veterinary Association had suppressed information.

Dear Editor,

Open letter to Presidents of RCVS and BVA

In 1991 the Raw Meaty Bones Lobby of concerned veterinarians blew the whistle on the gathering pet-food crisis.¹ The global veterinary authorities refused to hear the allegations. Ten years later in 2001 *Raw Meaty Bones: Promote Health* the fully referenced, evidence based exposition was published but widely suppressed.² In 2004 the House of Commons Early Day Motion, PROCESSED PET FOODS AND VETS, gained 55 signatures.³ In October 2007, in the absence of leadership from the veterinary authorities, the Association of Veterinary Students of Great Britain and Ireland took the initiative and debated the motion that: 'This House Believes Vets Should Advocate Feeding Manufactured Pet Food.'⁴ (Perhaps young doctors will advocate the feeding of manufactured diets too!)

Incongruous as it may be, after 65 million years' evolution during the Age of Mammals, some vets were prepared to stand up and argue *for* the motion. Without offering a shred of evidence Mr Mike Jessop suggested that 'the high quality of modern pet food was extending the lifespan of pets'. Mr Chris Laurence sought to rattle his complete and balanced manufactured sabre by invoking the Animal Welfare Act in support of manufactured diets. He emphasised that under the Act dogs, cats and rabbits have three essential needs:

- 1.) To be provided with a suitable diet.
- 2.) To be protected from pain, injury, suffering and disease.
- 3.) To express normal behaviour patterns.

Of course the Raw Meaty Bones Lobby provides extensive evidence to demonstrate those needs can only be satisfactorily met by feeding a natural diet.² Mr Laurence rather helpfully suggested in respect to the need to express normal behaviour:

Now normal behaviour patterns for dogs and cats includes chewing. And I don't think any commercial manufacturer would suggest that all you should ever feed is their commercial food – that you shouldn't give them something to chew and to exercise their gums and teeth on because that's the need to express natural behaviour.

Are we about to see Mr Laurence fall on his sabre? Perhaps he will be an early casualty when the prosecutions begin against those who disregard the Animal Welfare Act and force defenceless pets to consume junk food and force defenceless veterinary students to swallow hogwash.

Professor Sheila Crispin, an invited guest, abstained during voting. She stressed that she was speaking in a private capacity on behalf of her dogs and 'That her dogs are fed a mixture of commercial and home prepared food and that she would like to see more research that compared both commercially prepared and natural diets.'

Manufactured pet-food has *not been trialled for suitability and safety* (unless covertly in pet-food company marketing and research establishments) by comparison with the 65 million year established natural standard. Until advocates of manufactured pet food can present independent data confirming suitability and safety then all those engaged in the promotion and sale of artificial products do so without a shred of evidence.

Unfortunately, as Mr Roger Meacock pointed out during the Cambridge debate, when the truth about manufactured pet foods is finally known it will be the veterinary profession, not the manufacturers, who become the 'fall guys'.

But is it fair that the sons should pay for the sins of the fathers? In the veterinary context I think not and accordingly ask the President of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and President of the British Veterinary Association to open up debate and hasten a solution to the pet-food crisis.

Notes:

- 1.) Lonsdale, T (2007) Junk Pet Food And The Damage Done. *Nexus* Vol 14 No. 6 31-35 October-November Web: www.rawmeatybones.com
- 2.) Lonsdale, T (2001) *Raw Meaty Bones: Promote Health*. Rivetco P/L, Windsor, NSW, Australia
- 3.) Taylor, D (2004) House of Commons Early Day Motion 335. Web: <http://edmi.parliament.uk/EDMi/EDMDetails.aspx?EDMID=26858>
- 4.) Association of Veterinary Students of Great Britain and Ireland. Should Vets Advocate Feeding Manufactured Pet Food? Report of debate held at Robinson College, University of Cambridge, 24 October 2007 Web: <http://www.srcf.ucam.org/~ac411/>

Researchers grind whole rabbits with disastrous consequences

A group of University of California researchers published a paper (<http://www.cfa.org/articles/health/role-of-diet.html>) entitled: Role of Diet in the Health of the Feline Intestinal Tract and in Inflammatory Bowel Disease. Although influenced by the barf/vomit madness, in some ways they represent a welcome change from the typical hidebound researchers. They say:

'it is reasonable to speculate that cats fed a "natural diet" are less likely to develop IBD than cats fed "unnatural diets." The natural diet of cats does not contain wheat, milk, soybean, egg or many other ingredients commonly used. Nor does the natural diet of cats contain additives and preservatives such as guar and xanthum gums as food stabilizers, propionic acid and sorbic acids as preservatives, or carrageenan (made from seaweed and shown to cause intestinal inflammation in certain circumstances) (Strombeck, 1999). These ingredients, and many others, are added to commercial diets to improve their appearance to the pet owners and palatability to pets, but may result in an adverse reaction. The natural diet of cats is primarily small mammals, with a lesser proportion of insects, reptiles and birds. There is an obvious need for a "gold standard diet" against which to compare and study all "unnatural diets." Such a diet should be complete and balanced, relatively cheap, easily

obtained and may need to mimic the diet consumed by cats during their evolution. The task to develop and validate such a diet was given to Dr. Angie Glasgow.’

Despite apparent good intentions, Dr Glasgow failed in her task – even though she fed her research cats on whole rabbit.

‘Since cats eat most parts of their prey and essential nutrients are concentrated in different organs, the rabbits were not skinned, dressed or cleaned, but rather ground in their entirety. The ground whole rabbit diet was frozen in smaller batches and thawed prior to feeding.’

Note the misplaced emphasis on so-called ‘essential nutrients’ without any concern for the equally ‘essential’ physical form of natural food. Chewing on raw whole carcasses provides fundamental psychological benefits and ‘essential’ physical cleaning of teeth and gums. Besides predisposing her cats to periodontal and a host of other chronic diseases, it seems that somehow by grinding and freezing the rabbits the taurine was destroyed too. (There may be other explanations for the reported outcomes but for now we have Dr Glasgow’s report only.)

Avoiding disastrous consequences should not be difficult providing researchers pay attention to basic biological principles and the requirements of the Animal Welfare Act. Perhaps Dr Glasgow and her colleagues might like to check out the Three Part Test:

<http://seureshop.rawmeatybones.com/newsletter/view.epl?id=44>