Characteristics of 24 cases of animal hoarding in Spain

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Introduction

The defining features of animal hoarding are the presence of large numbers of animals kept in housing that does not provide the minimum standards expected of responsible pet ownership, and with the keeper being unable to recognise the negative consequences of such conditions on health and behaviour (Edsell-Vetter & Patronek 2011). Thus, collecting a large number of animals becomes a concern when the number overwhelms the ability of the hoarder to provide acceptable care (Patronek 1999).

The typical animal hoarder’s profile has been described as a middle-aged or old woman, usually unmarried and socially isolated who hoards only one species (dog or cat). Most cases presented a chronic course of more than five years of animal hoarding. The average number of animals per case was 50, with most animals being dogs. In 75% of cases the environment provided is typically found to be inadequate, inappropriate and overcrowded (Arluke 2006). The environment provided is typically found to be inadequate, inappropriate and overcrowded. Furthermore, animal hoarding has detrimental consequences for the hoarders themselves and for their communities (Patronek & Nathanson 2001; Arluke 2006).

Animal hoarding has a welfare cost for the animals concerned, and can be considered a form of animal cruelty (Arluke 2006). The environment provided is typically found to be inadequate, inappropriate and overcrowded. Furthermore, animal hoarding has detrimental consequences for the hoarders themselves and for their communities (Patronek & Nathanson 2001; Arluke 2006). The community cost arises from the involvement of multiple government agencies, and demands on city council technicians, public health officers and health professionals. Moreover, animal shelters are burdened with the responsibility of Immediately housing and caring for what may be a sudden and large influx of seized animals. Many of these animals need intensive veterinary care and some need to be euthanised. They often present a behavioural profile that makes adoption particularly complicated, so that they may remain in the shelter for long periods of time. Altogether, this represents a high economic cost for both animal shelters and administrations. Finally, social services and mental health services may be required to treat the psychological problems of the animal hoarder, although this seems as yet uncommon (Patronek et al 2006).

Animal hoarding seems to be a common and yet under-reported condition. In the US, the authorities identify between 700 and 2,000 new cases of animal hoarding per year. However, this is probably an underestimate, because only the most severe cases are detected (Frost & Steketee 2011). It seems that animal hoarding, and the intended or unwitting cruelty that accompanies it, is increasing or at least is being detected more often, as one online US database of animal cruelty suggests (www.pet-abuse.com/database) (Patronek & Nathanson 2009; Edsell-Vetter & Patronek 2011). Although awareness has increased over the past few years, it is considered insufficient. Increasing problem recognition is a