Cat admissions to RSPCA shelters in Queensland: A pilot study to describe the population of cats entering shelters and risk factors for euthanasia.

Corinne Hanlon

The Centre for Companion Animal Health
The School of Veterinary Science
'Overview'

- PhD
- Pilot study
- Cat entry to shelters
- Risk of euthanasia
- Understand the problem!
Why?

• Twice as many cats as dogs
• High cat euthanasia
• Moral and ethical implications
• Costs to the community
Human 'cost'

- 50% people working with euthanasia develop symptoms of 'post traumatic stress' disorder*

Economic Cost

• $82 million spent annually on the management of unwanted pets*

• Local Queensland government spent $30 million in one year*

• This is a huge amount of resources

Study Aim

• To describe the characteristics of cats entering Queensland RSPCA shelters and identify risk factors for euthanasia after entry.
Methods

- 24 month study period.
- RSPCA electronic database, ShelterMate©.
- All cats entering Queensland RSPCA shelters
- Data = year of intake, category of age at entry, gender, postcode of origin, method of admission to shelter, breed, and outcome.
- Univariable and multivariable risk regression analysis
Results

General information:

• N = 26,034 cats
• 66% adult cats, 34% kittens
• More than half (65%) of all cats were euthanised after admission.
The most common admission source was as a stray.

Amongst kittens entering shelters, most (69%) were admitted as a stray.
Results: Risk of Euthanasia

- Kittens (<6 months) being at greatest risk. (Risk Ratio 1.73; 95% CI 1.71 – 1.75. P = <0.001).
- Kittens were less likely to be adopted or reclaimed.

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Results - Risk of Euthanasia

- After adjusting for all other variables, postcode was still associated with risk of euthanasia ($P = <0.001$).

- Only 2 postcodes had a euthanasia rate less than 50%.
What does this mean?

- Kittens are 1.7 times more likely to be euthanised than adult cats.
- It is unclear from this study why.
- Seasonal influx and age of kitten admissions in warmer months is suspected as a causal factor.
What does this mean?

- If stray admissions are **truly** un-owned cats, then strategies to reduce cat admissions to shelters that target owned cats will have limited effect on this population.
What does this mean?

- As postcode is a risk factor for cats being euthanised it is possible:
  - shelter practice
  - local legislation
  - Environment/ climate
  - human demographics

- Influence euthanasia risk

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Conclusions

• More research is required to investigate the 'stray' population of cats.

• Further studies investigating the precise age and date of kittens at entry are required.

• Further research is required to establish why postcode is a risk factor for euthanasia.

• A single database can provide useful information!
Acknowledgments

• The generous financial support of:

    The Elsie Cameron Foundation
    Mr Guy Farrands

• The support and assistance of:

    Advisory team: Prof. Jacquie Rand, Dr. John Morton, Dr. Mandy Symons, Dr. Pauleen Bennett and Dr. Mark Lawrie.

Corinne Hanlon
Thank you

c.hanlon@uq.edu.au