



H136 Veterinary Forensic Pathology: Cases From an Emerging Discipline

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Learning Overview: The goal of this presentation is to inform the medical forensic community of the link between animal cruelty and interpersonal violence or people with psychological issues with examples of animal abuse.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by demonstrating that patterns and types of trauma in animals are similar to human victims and by informing attendees of the link between animal cruelty and interpersonal violence.

Animal abuse and neglect may involve a single animal and one person or hundreds of animals and many people. Animals and people are victims of the same types of fatal injury and severe neglect; however, the anatomy and physiology of different animal species and even breeds of animals represent a unique challenge for veterinary pathologists. Yet, animal abuse rarely occurs in isolation—when animals are abused, people are at risk and when people are abused, animals are at risk.¹ Animals may be sentinels for domestic abuse and cruelty to a pet is a recognized mechanism of psychological control over a partner: no species of animal is immune to these crimes. The link between animal abuse and concurrent or predicted interpersonal violence is well established. Medical examiners, investigators, and attorneys may not be aware that veterinary pathologists are employed at universities and diagnostic laboratories to perform postmortems or that some have developed expertise in the pathology of animal abuse and neglect. These people should also be aware that animal abuse affects not only the animal, but individuals, families, and society. Veterinary pathologists in this emerging subspecialty are in the fortunate position of learning from examples of systemic failings in medical forensic pathology, such as inadequate oversight, training, and certification. They can also benefit from the recent advances in several jurisdictions to rectify these issues.

Internationally, submissions of animals to veterinary diagnostic laboratories from law enforcement agencies have dramatically increased over the past 15 years. Reasons for this are speculative but factors likely include changes in legislation and mandatory reporting of suspected animal abuse by veterinarians. Cases submitted to a university veterinary diagnostic laboratory by law enforcement agencies for postmortem examination will be used to illustrate examples of animal cruelty and the context in which they arose.

Reference(s):

- ¹ Lockwood, R., and P. Arkow. 2016. Animal Abuse and Interpersonal Violence: The Cruelty Connection and Its Implications for Veterinary Pathology. *Veterinary Pathology* 53 (5): 910–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0300985815626575>.

Forensic, Pathology, Veterinary