Welfare of feline amputees

As part of research into the welfare of feline limb and tail amputees, we aim to characterise the feline amputee population of the UK, and obtain information on owner perception of feline recovery and adaptation.

In humans, phantom limb phenomena are reported in up to 80 per cent of people following amputation, and can be extremely debilitating. The aetiology is complex and not completely understood, and changes in peripheral and central processing of stimuli have been documented. Conversely, in companion animals the recovery and quality of life of amputees is generally felt to be good, with most owners reporting a satisfactory life for their pets after amputation.

There are a few case reports of neuropathic disorders in amputee animals and anecdotes of possible phantom phenomena, but no conclusive evidence. In cases where the post-amputation outcome is not satisfactory and/or where animals show signs of pain that is refractory to treatment, managing pain and identifying risk factors is fundamental to improving the welfare of affected cats.

We have designed a questionnaire for owners of amputee cats, which we will soon be sending to a random selection of UK veterinary practices, along with further information on the study. We would be extremely grateful if colleagues would pass the questionnaires on to any of their clients with amputee cats. In addition, we would be grateful to hear from any colleagues who have seen cases of post-amputation complications in cats that might indicate neuropathic disorders and/or phantom phenomena. Such complications may include signs of pain with no clear cause, ataxia or poor adaptation, or apparent reactions to, or reliance on, the absent limb or tail.

Cases in the literature are very few, and therefore any information on first-hand experience with such complications would be highly valuable in helping to understand and therefore improve the welfare of feline amputees.

To help in this study, please contact Lyn Forster, at the address below, telephone 01707 667044, e-mail: lforster@rvc.ac.uk

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