

Information on advertising policy re bulldogs, French bulldogs and pugs

In March 2017 *Veterinary Record* and its sister titles brought a change in advertising policy. Here we explain the reasons behind this change and invite you to support it.

You will no doubt be aware that for some time BVA has been actively highlighting the health and welfare problems suffered by brachycephalic (flat-faced) dogs.

This work has been driven by concerns raised by BVA members (our readers) who see brachycephalic breed health problems – from breathing difficulties to eye ulcers and painful spine abnormalities – in veterinary practices across the UK on a daily basis. In BVA's Spring 2016 Voice of the Veterinary Profession survey, companion animal vets said breeding (and associated hereditary defects) was the most pressing health and welfare issue in the UK.

Despite increasing warnings from vets and animal welfare charities about the many health and welfare issues associated with flat-faced breeds they continue to rise in popularity and visibility, fuelled by their prominence in the media.

Since last year, BVA has been writing to companies (veterinary and non-veterinary) and encouraging brands not to use images of any unhealthy dogs in advertising.

Veterinary Record and its sister titles have decided to take action to reinforce BVA's position.

What is our new policy?

Veterinary Record and its sister titles (*In Practice*, *Veterinary Record Case Reports* and *Veterinary Record Open*) will no longer accept adverts that use images of bulldogs, French bulldogs or pugs to promote non-breed specific products.

Images will continue to be used in our clinical reports, and in our editorial pages for the purposes of education and information – to illustrate health problems.

Adverts that promote products or services aimed at improving the health and welfare of these breeds specifically will also be allowed.

But in general, adverts promoting general veterinary products and services will no longer feature these breeds.

Why have we taken this decision?

As the popularity of flat-faced breeds has risen, so too has concern about their health problems.

They are predisposed to a lifetime of poor health. Because of their short muzzles, for example, they can struggle to breathe - even when undertaking day-to-day activities such as walking or eating.

They are also associated with

- eye problems
- skin diseases
- spine abnormalities
- neurological problems
- an inability to give birth naturally.

But why pick on flat-faced dogs?

Other pedigree dog breeds are prone to health problems so we might reasonably ban images of all such breeds. However, flat-faced breeds have physical deformities that are more obvious - lay people can 'see' them. This makes them good symbols for change.

Of all the brachycephalic breeds, demand for bulldogs, French bulldogs and pugs is particularly high. This is encouraging ever more breeding and irresponsible supply chains. By taking a stand and cutting images of these most popular brachycephalic breeds in promotional materials, we hope it will help to reduce demand for them.

What are the particular health concerns of these dogs?

Bulldogs, French bulldogs and pugs often have real problems breathing. Research shows that these three brachycephalic breeds are most likely to be affected by brachycephalic obstructive airway syndrome (BOAS).

But why not just use images of healthy brachycephalic dogs?

The answer to this is a pragmatic one – it's difficult for our advertising teams – and even for some experts - to tell the difference between a bulldog that can breathe relatively freely and one that can't on paper, so it's just easier to ban all images of the breed. And even if breathing is normal, the other problems such as predisposition to skin disease or inability to give birth naturally remain.

Is this the end of the story?

No. There is a bigger piece of work to be done here – the veterinary profession needs to agree some comprehensive guidelines for advertisers that will cover all breeds associated with extreme breeding.

BVA is currently working on a wider policy on the use of animals in advertising, which will take into account characteristics, behaviours and appropriate context.

How can you support this?

We hope that by taking this stand, we can encourage advertisers to select images that promote good health and wellbeing of animals for any forthcoming advertising campaigns.

Since publishing this new position in Veterinary Record on 25 March 2017, we have had strong support from our audience – with record engagement on social media – and support from the industry and charity sectors.

It would be great to involve industry. You are a very important voice in this change process. By supporting the veterinary profession in taking this strong stance, you can be aligned with an important animal welfare issue.

Vet Record will very gladly name companies that revise their own advertising approaches as a result of this decision in our editorial pages.

It's not about banning the dogs; it's about reducing demand for these breeds and improving dog health and welfare.