How does animal hoarding hurt animals, people, families, and communities?

- Dozens to hundreds of animals kept in squalor, diseases untreated, starvation, crowding, fighting, ammonia-laden atmosphere, tight confinement, poor mental well-being, death
- Property destroyed, public health threatened, code and zoning violations
- Self-neglect, neglect of minor children or dependent adults
- Alienation of affection, estrangement of family members
- Mental health problems undiagnosed & untreated; physical health threatened
- Intervention is costly, traumatic, protracted, and often has unsatisfactory outcomes for all involved.

A problem with mental health components addressed primarily through prosecution for cruelty to animals

- Presence of “Five Freedoms” for Animal Welfare
- Quality of life
- Quality of freedom
- Freedom from hunger and thirst
- Freedom from discomfort
- Freedom from pain and injury
- Freedom from fear and distress
- Freedom from separation
- Freedom from inadequate social contact
- Freedom from looming or other forms of inappropriate stimulation

Advantages of prosecution

- Provides the ‘thread’ needed to achieve compliance
- Avoids breaking a broader range of solutions, including prohibitions against future animal ownership or prohibition without jail time if the person does not re-offend
- Penalizes criminal acts when the elements of a crime can be proved
- In line with current thinking that cruelty to animals is a serious offense and crimes must be pursued vigorously

Limitations of prosecution

- Unable to address deficiencies in care until the deprivation and animal cruelty become frankly criminal
- No way to pro-actively address issues of dangerousness to self or others
- People with mental health problems become criminals
- Community or non-profit bear considerable costs
- Reincarceration remains high even with conviction

What should be the balance between punitive and therapeutic regimens?

Attachment-based model of Animal Hoarding

Early childhood experiences (neglect, abuse, inconsistent parenting); genetics, neurodevelopmental factors; trauma (common in the histories of animal hoarders)

Findings from the Henderson House Workgroup

- Animal hoarding has little symptomatic overlap with OCD
- Significant comorbidity observed in object hoarding and likely in animal hoarding
- Psychopathology of animal hoarding poorly defined and likely heterogeneous
- Few therapeutic tools exist for treating animal hoarding
- Treatments not suitable for novice clinicians
- No published treatment recommendations for animal hoarding
- Drug therapy untested for animal hoarders

Challenges for mental health professionals

- Insurance does not cover treatment
- Hoarders have poor insight, low motivation, high ambivalence, and treatment resistant behaviors
- Animal hoarders may have poorer insight and be more available to treatment than object hoarders
- Therapists have little training in the human-animal bond, which must be understood to appreciate how animals can be the source of safety, security, and attachment
- Unclear what is required or expected from a court-ordered assessment

What is mentalization?*

- Mentaling is a form of emotional knowledge that involves being able to appreciate the reality of others
- Deficits in mentalizing are associated with a history of childhood attachment trauma (common in the histories of animal hoarders)
- Deficits result in an acquired failure to understand how others think and feel
- Can be obvious to others/ mental states OR have unrestrained imagination
- Deficits in learning how to interpret other’s states of mind, emotions, and projection

Morality, Decency and Good Conduct

- Animal hoarding is maintained?
- Could failure of therapeutic care be one mechanism by which animal hoarding is maintained?

Animal hoarding: A Neglected Problem at the Intersection of Psychiatry, Veterinary Medicine, and Law

Findings from the Henderson House Workgroup

- Members of the Henderson House Interdisciplinary Workgroup
- Juli 26, 2011; Funded by a grant from the AP-LS

Animal and children: Similar vulnerability to caregivers’ failures, but very different legal remedies

- Mass. Law, Chapter 272: Crimes Against Chastity, Morality, Decency and Good Order. § 77: Cruelty to animals
- Cruelty statutes enacted to protect children from purposely, morally deficient offenders, not written to ensure proper animal care
- Have a lack of awareness of states of distress OR make their own rules about what constitutes distress
- Feelings = reality. Only things that can be touched or felt are real. Seeing an animal in a cage is real – imagining they are unhappy is not

- Mass. Law, Chapter 119: Protection and Care of Children
- Child protection statutes created to protect children against the harmful effects resulting from the absence, inadequacy, inappropriacy or destructive behavior of parents or parent substitutes and ensure the long-term well-being of the child

Can a pro-active approach to deteriorating animal care be developed?