By its very nature, the concept of change is a bitter pill... after all, change not only defies tradition, it challenges intellect and fosters uncertainty. Perhaps it should be no surprise that recent presentations and publications suggesting dogs and cats receive fewer vaccines, and do so less often, have provoked significant controversy, concern, and even confusion among companion animal practitioners.

So why change? Vaccination is what we do well, and its what many veterinarians do most! Historically speaking, vaccination is a service that veterinary medicine has provided to pets for well over 50 years... and with exceptional results. What better health value is there, in fact, than a vaccine capable of preventing infection by highly contagious, virulent organisms such as rabies virus, feline panleukopenia virus, or canine parvovirus? That dogs and cats derive substantial health benefits from vaccination programs is unquestioned. But, is there a "down-side" to vaccination? Have we, in fact, reached a point of diminishing returns with respect to vaccination?

In this issue of The Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice, we have attempted to address the controversies and the concerns over recommended changes in vaccination protocols for dogs and cats. The reader must understand that this publication is neither the final word on companion animal vaccination nor is it intended to represent national vaccination standards. Instead, it is a compilation of articles that specifically target the foremost vaccination issues of importance to practicing veterinarians. Objectively, the articles published in this issue will enable practitioners to make an informed decision regarding which vaccines to use and how often to administer them.

In separate articles, an in-depth review of key controversies is presented followed by two articles outlining the most current vaccination guidelines for dogs and for cats. Supporting references are included. These three articles set the stage for the papers that follow. A review of the table of contents will reveal that some of the most contentious issues surrounding the vaccine controversy are addressed: vaccine-associated adverse events (i.e., adverse reactions), use of adjuvanted vaccine in cats, feline vaccine-associated fibrosarcoma, and new
vaccine technology (recombinant vaccines). Of significant importance to veterinarians are the legal issues surrounding decisions to vaccinate in a manner not specifically recommended on the manufacturers' label (package insert). Two articles, one on interpreting the vaccine label and another that specifically addresses practitioner liability related to vaccination are included. Finally, two highly informative articles on rabies immunization, postexposure immunoprophylaxis and the latest update on importation of dogs and cats to rabies-free areas of the world, are presented.

Back, then, to the original question. Are we, in fact, vaccinating dogs and cats with too many vaccines, too often? In the absence of national vaccination standards and routine monitoring, only the individual practitioner can answer this question. Vaccination is a medical procedure that mandates clinical assessment of the patient's health status and risk of exposure to infectious disease when deciding which vaccine(s) to administer and when. All of us who have contributed to this issue hope that the information provided will represent a compelling starting point for at least reviewing vaccination protocols in place within individual practices.

As the editor of this issue, I want to extend my sincere thanks to each of the contributing authors who have willingly shared much of their valuable time and expertise in preparing manuscripts on what must be considered one of the most important topics facing companion animal medicine today. In addition, I want to acknowledge Mr. John Vassallo, editor of The Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice, for his suggestions, his patience, and his assistance in completing this issue.

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