Preface

Confronting the Problem of Obesity in Dogs and Cats

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It has been over 20 years since Lund and colleagues\(^1\) collected data on more than 30,000 dogs and 14,000 cats seen at primary care practices throughout the United States. This large-scale investigation revealed that approximately 28% of dogs and cats were identified as overweight or obese. Since then, the problem of obesity in companion animals has been the focus of a substantial number of investigations ranging from epidemiologic studies of risk factors to controlled trials in a laboratory or clinical setting to bench-top research in areas such as genetics, omics, and the microbiome. Addressing obesity in dogs and cats has also garnered attention in the private sector, including the development of over-the-counter and therapeutic pet foods, pharmaceuticals, and a range of products designed to control food intake, promote exercise, or provide environmental enrichment.

Despite all of this attention, the problem of pet dog and cat obesity is still with us. Moreover, recent studies document an even greater prevalence of overweight and obesity in companion animals, and not just in the United States, but also worldwide. It is becoming clear that confronting this problem will likely require a change in how both pet owners and veterinarians think about it.

Obesity is more than just a cosmetic issue. Adipose tissue is an organ by definition, and obesity is now recognized as, and should be presented to pet owners in the context of, organ dysfunction. Excess weight should be included in a patient’s problem list, just as cardiac or kidney dysfunction would be, so that a plan can be made to address it. Furthermore, as with any form of organ dysfunction, adipose tissue dysfunction can contribute to diseases of other organs and systems.

To be the best advocates for their patients, veterinarians will need to effectively convey that, contrary to popular belief, overweight/obesity is not normal and needs to be addressed appropriately.

We recognize that the problem of obesity is not an easy one to discuss with pet owners, to prevent, to treat, or to manage, and it is our hope that this issue of the
Veterinary Clinics of North America: Small Animal Practice will help to overcome these challenges. We have endeavored to bring together experts in the research on and the clinical management of the problem of obesity in dogs and cats to provide a current and comprehensive review encompassing pathogenesis, risk factors, health consequences, and available therapeutic interventions, including diet, exercise, and behavioral modification. It is our hope that it will be an essential resource for the small animal practitioner who serves in the frontline for the prevention and treatment of this serious condition.

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