Canine Devocalization-Save The Voice

The organization geared towards banning canine devocalization and creating an alternative option

Tag Words: Devocalization; Canine; Ventriculocordectomy; Health Problems; Save the Voice; Ban

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Summary

A Ventriculocordectomy, commonly known as devocalization, is a very invasive procedure and can cause many health problems. There are many individuals, groups and organizations that have conflicting views and varying ethical concerns regarding canine devocalization. As an alternative to the surgery, we have developed a business plan, Save the Voice, in which owners could bring their animals to be properly trained. Our goal is to ban devocalization in the United States beginning with New Jersey. We have prepared a legislative bill which we will send to Bob Smith, Legislator of District 17 (New Brunswick Area) to propose a complete ban of this surgery without appropriate medical reasoning.
The Issue: Devocalization

Surgical Procedure
The process of devocalization is the surgical removal of the vocal cords. The vocal cords are responsible for producing sound by vibrating. The vibrations cause them to rub together and this action emits sound. The varying speeds that the vocal cords vibrate create differing pitches of sound. If they are vibrating at very fast speeds, a higher sound is emitted. At slower speeds, a lower sound is produced. They are comprised of muscle and ligament, and covered by mucosal tissue, and are very fragile. They can be removed in two ways; either by an oral approach or a Laryngotomy approach. An animal can be partially or totally devocalized by either of these methods. In an Oral approach, the animal is positioned on its’ stomach and the surgery is performed through the oral cavity. This is the less invasive method of the two. In a Laryngotomy approach, the animal is positioned on its’ back and the surgery is performed through an incision in the larynx. This is the more invasive method, cutting directly into the voice box. In both methods, an endotracheal tube cannot be used because it would interfere with the surgery. Because of this, the risks of anesthesia are increased. As a result, anesthesia must be delivered to the animal by injection or by first performing another pre-surgical procedure known as a temporary tracheotomy (a hole cut into the throat for the purpose of inserting the endotracheal tube directly into the trachea). Anesthesia by injection is very hard to manipulate during a routine surgery, and getting it just right for a risky surgery is a huge risk for the doctor performing the devocalization. A pre-surgical temporary tracheotomy is in itself a major procedure and is very difficult to maintain during the procedure and care for post surgery. Not only is the surgery itself dangerous, but other surgical risks exist besides the obvious damage to the larynx. Infection is very likely due to the high bacterial growth in the larynx and trachea that cannot be sterilized during surgery. Also, if blood supply to the muscle and tissues is compromised enough, necrosis can occur, resulting in permanent narrowing of the passages. Another risk is the development of scarred vocal cord tissue called ‘webbing’. The webbing can be used to create sound, undermining the effects of the surgery and making further surgeries wanted by the owner. (PC)

Drawbacks of the Surgery
Although some dog owners and veterinarians may look only to the benefits of dog devocalization, there are some very disturbing drawbacks to this type of surgery. It is estimated that 50% of dogs will develop some type of complication linked to the devocalization surgery. During the surgery, the dog faces the risk of excessive bleeding and infection which makes the incidence of postoperative complications is even higher. One life-threatening complication is that scar tissue may obstruct the dog’s airway (idsusa.org). This occurs due to webbing of the glottis (Code of practice). Without proper breathing and enough oxygen, the dog may suffocate to death. There is also the possibility that the dog regains his ability to bark, usually within two to three years. (RA)

Also after the procedure, varying sounds may occur in the dog, ranging from low, harsh, more muffled to raspy, wheezy, screechy and high pitched. (MP) Before considering this procedure, the vet has to be aware of the history and physical history of the dog (Code of practice for debarking of dogs). There are many surgical risks involved with this procedure, such as anesthesia (the dog may/may not recover), infection, or tissue regrowth (webbing). Correcting
any one of these complications involves more surgery, added risks, and of course, more money. Another complication to the debarking surgery is that the dog’s ability to communicate with other animals and humans is reduced (idsusa.org). In such case, the welfare of the animal may be put in jeopardy if it cannot attract attention to alert of possible dangers. This is especially true if the dog is placed among other dogs that are unfamiliar with the devocalized dog (Code of practice). A serious consequence of devocalization that is becoming a problem in San Francisco is the ability to disguise a large number of dogs (idausa.org). When there are a large number of dogs being kept in one residence, devocalization ensures that the public is not made aware of this. Such practice can lead to undetected dog fighting and other inhumane practices. Lastly, debarking a vicious dog may put those around it danger. Without adequate warning from menacing barks, individuals near a devocalized dog may not have enough time to respond to the dog’s sudden attack (idausa.org). Thus, devocalization surgery puts not only the dog in discomfort and danger, but those around it as well. (RA)

Medical issues related to devocalization of dogs should only be limited to those causing pain to the animal. For example, if there is a tumor in the dog in which the vocal cord has to be taken out, then the vet should make the decision of taking out the vocal cords in order to save the dogs’ life. If the operation is a last resort to save the dog, then it should take place. Another situation in which the procedure is preformed is when the barking becomes a public nuisance and a complaint is filed (Code of practice for debarking of dogs). (MP)

Devocalization should not take place for the convenience to the owners of the dogs or for cosmetic preferences on the animal. Before getting a pet, the owner should research the background of the breed they want to keep. Characteristics and history of the animal should be considered. Small dogs usually bark more often than big dogs for instance. (MP)

Goal

Our goal for this project is to completely ban the process of devocalization in all of United States. Currently, there are bills that are being pushed forward in Massachusetts and Pennsylvania that would ban devocalization. Some states only allow licensed Veterinarians to perform this procedure on animals. The AVMA (American Veterinary Medical Association) policy on canine devocalization states: “Canine devocalization should only be preformed by qualified, licensed veterinarians as a final alternative after behavioral modification efforts to correct excessive vocalization have failed” (http://www.avma.org/issues/policy/animalwelfare/devocalization.asp). In Massachusetts, a fourteen year old boy started a petition in order to ban devocalization after adopting a pet dog that had suffered through this. He earned the support of Senator Scott Brown who is a co-sponsor for the bill. There are about forty co-sponsors for this bill altogether. Some states that tried to ban devocalization include New Jersey, California and Ohio. The proposed Massachusetts bill is known as H.344. If this bill is passed then it would ban devocalization for cosmetic reasons. It will only allow Veterinarians to perform this kind of surgery only for medical purposes. As of right now, Massachusetts is the only state that is working very hard to get this bill approved and made into a law. There are many opponents for this bill. Some opponents are against the ban of devocalization because they believe that an animal that barks a lot would be forced into a crowded shelter and be killed. In order to save that animal, devocalization must be performed so the animal is adopted by a family. (AA)
The controversy surrounding the practice of canine devocalization is widespread throughout the nation. There are owners of canine companions that prefer the devocalization procedure for convenience purposes, or there is an underlying medical reason for the decision. In other cases, owners use devocalization for illegal purposes. For example, people associated with dog fighting have their dogs devocalized so there would not be any noises that would bring about suspicions from neighbors. Also, some owners have their dogs devocalized for guarding purposes. Therefore, potential criminals that break into houses would not hear a dog creeping up on them. (MS)

The AVMA (American Veterinary Medical Association) policy on canine devocalization states: “Canine devocalization should only be performed by qualified, licensed veterinarians as a final alternative after behavioral modification efforts to correct excessive vocalization have failed” (http://www.avma.org/issues/policy/animal_welfare/devocalization.asp). This policy was approved in 2002. Since then, there have been bills passed in different states, such as Massachusetts, that ban devocalization surgery in dogs. The ASPCA as well as other animal welfare organizations have petitions against this practice. (MS)

The procedure of canine devocalization should be completely limited to last resort medical purposes. It should never be a convenience option. The owners of the dogs should be prepared and open to canine companionship, as well as dealing with the issues that a dog may have. Dogs are living creatures; thus, they should not be treated as a piece of furniture to be moved or remodeled at the owner’s convenience. People should do their research on specific breeds that are right for their living conditions and be prepared for any responsibilities a dog may require. (MS)

Conclusion
All in all, devocalization is a very painful and invasive procedure. It is complicated and risky and is not very effective. This surgery only leads to further surgeries and suffering for the animal. It is an unnecessary procedure that can lead to nerve damage and chronic respiratory problems. This procedure is in no way practical or safe in a medical sense.

The Service Project

Cover Letter:
Bob Smith
216 Stelton Rd., Suite E-5, Piscataway, NJ 08854

To whom it may concern:
We are a group from Rutgers University who is currently working on ways to prevent animal abuse. In particular, we are focused on banning canine devocalization in the United States starting with New Jersey. The process of devocalization is the surgical removal of the vocal cords to prevent barking. The surgery for devocalization is an invasive process which causes many long term side effects. The animal has a higher chance of getting a chronic infection after the surgery. There is also a possibility of sound to come back due to the scar tissue left over from the surgery. Many people choose this surgery only for their convenience not for medical purposes. We have proposed a business plan that offers alternative programs to devocalization.
Thank You for taking the time to read the legislation and for your kind consideration.
Sincerely,
Patricia Curella ‘10

Madhuri Patharkar ‘11

Rosanna Abraham ‘11

Mandi Stewart ‘11

Afra Anees ‘11

Legislation: Community Project
We are proposing a bill to Legislator Bob Smith to eventually create a law and hopefully spread throughout the whole country. The bill is as follows:

Save the Voice Bill
To Ban Devocalization of Canines in New Jersey

Whereas, infection is very likely after surgery due to bacterial growth in the larynx and trachea;

Whereas, if blood supply to the muscle and tissue is compromised enough, necrosis, or tissue death can occur to that part of the body;

Whereas, scarred vocal cord tissue known as webbing can develop, causing the dog’s airway to become obstructed, which may lead to suffocation;

Whereas, excessive bleeding and infection can occur following the surgery;

Whereas, the dog may or may not recover from the anesthesia required for the surgery;

Whereas, the surgery is not one-hundred percent effective; the dog can regain his ability to bark within two to three years;

Whereas, correcting any complications involves more surgery, added risks, and more money;

Whereas the dog’s ability to communicate with other animals and humans is reduced;

Whereas, devocalization can lead to undetected dog fighting and other inhumane practices; and

Whereas, debarking a vicious dog may put those around it in danger: Now, therefore, be it

Enacted,

Section 1. All veterinarians must be prohibited from performing the devocalization surgery without justifiable medical reasons. Justifiable medical reasons include any condition in which the animal possesses painful or uncomfortable chronic illness or infection of the vocal cords;
Section 2. All veterinarians who choose to perform this surgery should be mandated to pay a fine of $1000 and if repeated violations exist, serve a sentence of six months community service. If sentence is not served, then license will be revoked; and

Section 3. Members of the New Jersey state government should use this document as a basis for creation of a law that prohibits devocalization surgery and to take every possible measure to help spread this law to all fifty states.

Respectfully Submitted,
Patricia Curella ‘10
Madhuri Patharkar ‘11
Rosanna Abraham ‘11
Mandi Stewart ‘11
Afra Anees ‘11

Cosponsors
Julie M. Fagan, Ph.D.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION
Tuesday, November 17, 2009:
Originally proposed.

Business: Save the Voice

The name of our organization is Save the Voice. We are against the practice of canine devocalization and would like to have it banned. Our business involves dog trainers who will work with both owners and dogs to address the vocalization problem. As an alternative to devocalization, we provide training classes for any age or breed dog or relative obedience. The trainers use a positive reinforcement technique to attempt to redirect the dog’s attention and energy. We in turn educate owners on the standards of the breed of their canine companions and help them figure out the reason for their dog’s excessive vocalization. If the dog is not very dog-friendly, we offer private classes, where owner and dog receive one-on-one training session. In addition, our trainers are more than willing to go to their client’s houses for convenience purposes. It is in our best interest to advertise to local veterinarians to provide an alternative to performing a rather difficult and controversial procedure. We encourage veterinarians to choose against this practice and hopefully outlaw it completely in this state.
Dear Editor,

I am sending this editorial because it is about a topic that I am highly against and I would like it to be published in your newsletter so that others will be aware about it. It is about canine devocalization, a medical procedure that is very invasive and can cause many serious health problems to the animal. Among animals, several dogs have gone through this process of ventriculocordectomy, commonly known as devocalization. This process includes the surgical removal of the vocal cords, which can cause many complications and severe pain to the animal. Usually this procedure is done because the owners do not want the dogs to bark. Thus, it is done for the convenience of the owner. However, because of this harsh procedure, many side effects and complications can occur. Infections may occur because of increased bacterial growth in the larynx and trachea. The scarred tissues can obstruct the dog’s airways due to webbing of the glottis. In addition, risks from anesthesia increase because the dog may or may not recover from this surgery. Moreover, if any of these complications were to be corrected in some way, it would involve more surgery, added risks, as well as more money!

Other non-surgical, or non-direct risks, are the dog’s ability to communicate with other animals and humans, as well as possibly placing other people in danger. The dog’s ability to communicate with other animals and humans are reduced since it cannot attract attention to alert possible dangers. The welfare of the animal in this case may be put in jeopardy. On the other hand, debarking a vicious dog may put those around it in danger. Other people or animals would not have a warning for a vicious dog. In addition to these risks, after the procedure, varying sounds may occur in the dog, ranging from low, harsh, more muffled to raspy, wheezy, screechy, and high-pitched. I believe canine devocalization should be prohibited from the United States and should only be performed if it is a medical necessity.
The medical issues that should be related to devocalization of dogs are only if the dog is in pain or has a tumor in the vocal cords, in which the procedure must take place. In this case, the veterinarian should make the decision of taking out the vocal cords in order to save the dog’s life. If the operation is the last resort to save the dog, then it should take place.

I strongly believe that devocalization should not take place unless absolutely necessary. I am against causing any kind of pain to animals. Animals should be treated just like any other human being, with the respect, love, and care that one would give to another. Dogs are just like human beings and should not be ill treated. Just because the dog barks a lot does not mean they should have to go through this painful process and live through a life of misery with no voice. Being able to bark is the only way dogs are able to communicate with others and can show their emotions. Without their voice, they do not have a way to express how they feel when they are happy, sad, or angry. Dogs need to be able to bark so they can express themselves. Not only are the dogs not able to communicate, but they are also in severe pain. Their voices are scratchy and internally they may be in pain because of a complication. Without their voices, they cannot even express that they are in pain! I am strongly against this procedure and would hope to see this process banned across the United States. Please take the time to publish this into your newsletter. I would appreciate it. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Madhuri Patharkar

To whom it may concern:

My name is Afra Anees and currently I am a senior at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey. I am writing this editorial because of my high concern for devocalization of animals, as the number of animals going through this unnecessary process has increased in the last couple of years. Devocalization is a surgical process that removes vocal cords of an animal. The medical term for devocalization is ventriculocordectomy. The process of devocalization is the removal of the vocal cords, which are responsible for producing sound by vibrating. An animal can either be partially or completely devocalized. A complete devocalization of the vocal cords is more dangerous than a partial devocalization, since the complete devocalization is a more invasive surgical procedure than a partial devocalization surgery. There are a lot more surgical risks that many owners choose to ignore because they just want to silence their dog since they cannot bare the barking of the dog anymore.

Devocalization should only be allowed for medical purposes not for the convenience of the owners. The process of devocalization should completely be banned from the United States. It helps support illegal activities such as dog fighting. People can just get a dog devocalized without any reason and participate in dog fighting without the neighbors suspecting anything since there will be not a lot of barking. As of right now, Massachusetts is the only state to have a law that forbids any other doctor performing the ventriculocordectomy surgery on an animal. The law states that only Veterinarians should be allowed to perform this surgery on an animal. In my opinion, this surgery should not be allowed at all. It is a dangerous procedure that is only done because the owners’ are tired of hearing their dog bark.

There are many alternatives to this surgery. One alternative could be to get the animal properly...
trained by an expert so the animal may stop barking when it is not necessary. Devocalization should be banned from the United States.

Sent to: Ann Brightman at Animal Wellness Magazine
Email: info@redstonemediagroup.com
Phone Number: (705) 741-0817
Address: 107 Hunter Street East, Suite 201
Peterborough, ON K9H 1G7, Canada

Patricia Curella

Email submitted to Dog Fancy magazine. The email address to submit queries is barkback@dogfancy.com

To Whom it May Concern:

I am a student at Rutgers University in New Jersey and a frequent reader of this magazine. I also work as a veterinary technician and am very concerned with the well being and correct treatment of all animals great and small. I am currently working on a project at the university which enables me and a group of four other students to create an organization in which we can better society. We chose to speak out against canine devocalization by researching, writing to a number of publications and writing a state legislation against this procedure. Our organization is called “Save the Voice” and our goal is to educate the public about the harmfulness of devocalization and to prevent veterinarians from performing it for anything other than medical reasons. Below is the article introducing the topic and explaining our goals in preventing devocalization. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
Patricia A. Curella

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Save The Voice

A Ventriculocordectomy, commonly known as devocalization is a very invasive procedure performed on cats and dogs for the purpose of quieting the animal. The effects of the surgery can cause many long lasting health problems. There are many individuals, groups and organizations that have conflicting views regarding canine devocalization. The ethical concerns surrounding this issue are very controversial. As a part of the Save The Voice program at Rutgers University, it is our goal to educate the public on the dangers of this procedure and to help prevent veterinarians from performing it.

The process of devocalization is the surgical removal of the vocal cords. The vocal cords are responsible for producing sound by vibrating. The vibrations cause them to rub together and this action emits sound. The varying speeds that the vocal cords vibrate create differing pitches of sound. If they are vibrating at very fast speeds, a higher sound is emitted. At slower speeds, a lower sound is produced. They are comprised of muscle and ligament, and covered by mucosal tissue, and are very fragile. They can be removed in two ways; either by an oral approach or a Laryngototomy approach. An animal can be partially or totally devocalized by either of these
methods. In an Oral approach, the animal is positioned on its’ stomach and the surgery is performed through the oral cavity. This is the less invasive method of the two. In a Laryngotomy approach, the animal is positioned on its’ back and the surgery is performed through an incision in the larynx. This is the more invasive method, cutting directly into the voice box. In both methods, an endotracheal tube cannot be used because it would interfere with the surgery. Because of this, the risks of anesthesia are increased. As a result, anesthesia must be delivered to the animal by injection or by first performing another pre-surgical procedure known as a temporary tracheotomy (a hole cut into the throat for the purpose of inserting the endotracheal tube directly into the trachea). Anesthesia by injection is very hard to manipulate during a routine surgery, and getting it just right for a risky surgery is a huge risk for the doctor performing the devocalization. A pre-surgical temporary tracheotomy is in itself a major procedure and is very difficult to maintain during the procedure and care for post surgery. Not only is the surgery itself dangerous, but other surgical risks exist besides the obvious damage to the larynx. Infection is very likely due to the high bacterial growth in the larynx and trachea that cannot be sterilized during surgery. Also, if blood supply to the muscle and tissues is compromised enough, necrosis can occur, resulting in permanent narrowing of the passages. Another risk is the development of scarred vocal cord tissue called ‘webbing’. The webbing can be used to create sound, undermining the effects of the surgery and making further surgeries wanted by the owner.

The truth of the matter is, that devocalization has more disadvantages then benefits to the animal and to the owner. It is painful, costly, hard to maintain after surgery and has a very low success rate. Save the Voice is not only writing legislation to the state of New Jersey to prevent the surgery without medical reasoning, we are also proposing an alternate attempt at quieting the animal. Our proposition includes anti-barking training. Owners who request the surgery without medical necessity would be sent to facilities in which qualified trainers would condition dogs against barking. Of course, there is no way to stop veterinarians and owners who would go through the process illegally, but this organization would substantially cut down the unnecessary pain and suffering of thousands of animals per year. Help us make a difference. Help us Save the Voice. Speak out against canine devocalization and vote against it with us as we strive to defend the helpless victims of selfish owners.

Sources:
http://hsvma.org

November 02, 2009
Dear Editor:

I would greatly appreciate it if you would consider my editorial for publication.

“Bark Off”
By: Rosanna Abrahim

Humans are capable of inflicting immeasurable pain and suffering. You would not think that these terms would be applied to man’s best friend. However, this is exactly what happens to our fluffy four-legged friends when their owners chose to have them undergo devocalization surgery.
The main rationale behind having the procedure to remove the dog’s vocal cords is that the dog has become a public nuisance because of excessive barking. Excuses aside, it is my contention that canine devocalization be prohibited and only performed in cases of absolute medical necessity.

Over fifty percent of dogs develop complications linked to the devocalization surgery. The risks associated with anesthesia are extremely high. During the surgery, an endotracheal tube that delivers oxygen to the lungs cannot be used; it interferes with the procedure. As a result, anesthesia is either delivered by injection or by another pre-surgical procedure known as temporary tracheotomy. Both methods are difficult and provide added risks for the animal. Infection is another huge complication of surgery. The larynx and trachea are not areas that can be sterilized during the surgery. This leads to excess bacterial growth and infection. It amazes me that anyone would take a perfectly healthy animal and expose it to such dangers all for the sake of a little more quiet. Post-surgery, the risks are still high. The development of scar tissue can obstruct the dog’s airway due to webbing of the glottis. Without enough oxygen, the dog may very well suffocate to death. And for what? All for the owner’s selfish reasons. The worst part of the whole surgery is the fact that the dog can regain his ability to bark. Then it is back to surgery, the added risks, and of course, more money.

If the surgery does not directly threaten the dog’s life, it still poses non-direct risks to the animal. For one, the dog’s ability to communicate with other animals becomes reduced. If he cannot bark to defend himself, his welfare becomes jeopardized. Any dog owner who is willing to let this happen might as well just feed their animal to a pack of hungry wolves. Another outcome of the devocalization surgery is the ability of owners to disguise a large number of dogs. This can lead to practices such as undetected dog fighting. The amount of fear in a dog put in such a situation must be tremendous. After all, he has lost his form of communication as well as been subject to physical attack. The animals are not the only ones harmed by canine devocalization. Humans can also become subject to attack by a devocalized dog. Without any warning from barks, a person can face a serious attack by a vicious dog.

I mentioned that devocalization should only be performed in cases of absolute medical necessity. By this I mean that the surgery should only be carried out if the dog is in severe pain or if he has a life-threatening tumor in the vocal cords. If and only if devocalization is the only medical procedure capable of saving the dog’s life should it be performed. Those who choose the surgery say a whole lot about their character. In fact, it shows an individual who would rather find a quick fix to the problem than deal with it at its source. We have to remember that our animals are an extension of us. They are similar to our children, and one would not take drastic surgical procedures on their child just because they had behavioral problems. A dog who barks excessively is showing signs that his owner has trained him inadequately or has failed to meet his needs. This kind of behavior requires patient, loving understanding, not abandonment and frustration.

Sincerely,

Rosanna Abraham

Advanstar Communications
8033 Flint, Lenexa, KS 66214
The Controversy of Canine Devocalization

I am writing to express a deep concern surrounding a cruel and unnecessary practice to which some dogs could be subjected. As an animal lover and enthusiast, it saddens me that this practice is still allowed in so many states. The practice that I am referring to is canine devocalization, or canine ventriculocordectomy. Though some may have never heard of this, many others are greatly opposed to it, and many animal rights organizations as well as communities are attempting to have it banned in their states, and ultimately nationwide. Canine devocalization is a surgical procedure to remove the vocal chords to prevent the dog from barking. This is an extremely dangerous procedure that provides risks of chronic infections and possible necrosis of the tissues, which can permanently narrow the air passageways. In addition, this procedure is not always effective. There could be scarring of the vocal chords called “webbing” which could produce sound and the dog could be subjected to more surgeries.

Canine devocalization usually is a convenience option. Though some owners may feel they have a probable reason of consenting to this, it is not necessary. Our canine companions communicate in a different way from us, and that should not be taken away from them. People should research the dog they choose to bring into their home and should be aware of the breed standards, as well as the responsibilities they may have. Dogs are living creatures that love their masters unconditionally and should be loved as a loyal and protective part of the family. Dogs are not a piece of furniture that could be remodeled or thrown out to the owner’s convenience. Please take a stand to ban canine devocalization in your state and join the fight to save the voice of animals.