**Proposed letter to *Vet Record***

*Urgent need for vets to stop dangerous trend in pet obesity*

Obesity is a condition in which an excess body fat has developed to the point that health is adversely affected.1 Dogs that are overweight have a shortened lifespan,2 their quality of life is adversely affected,3 and they are predisposed to other conditions including osteoarthritis, diabetes mellitus and certain types of neoplasia.4 At a recent World Small Animal Veterinary Association One Health meeting, canine obesity was officially classified as a disease, which is consistent with its classification in humans.5 The last study to report obesity prevalence in UK pet dogs was published in 2010, and 59% of dogs were classified as overweight or obese.6

Between June 2016 and October 2017, dog owners attending seven different family pet shows in five UK locations (Berkshire, Cheshire, Hertfordshire, Kent, and Manchester) consented to their dog having a body condition score assessment by a team of experienced veterinary nurses. Data from 1100 adult (≥24mo) and 516 juvenile (<24mo) dogs were available for analysis. In adult dogs, 715 (65%) were overweight (BCS 6/9 to 9/9) and 99 (9%) were obese (BCS 8/9 or 9/9). Most concerning was the prevalence of obesity in the juvenile dogs examined, where 190 (37%) and 16 (3%) were classified as overweight and obese, respectively. Further, the prevalence increased steadily during the growth phase, from 21% (21/100) in dogs <6mo to 52% (16/31) in dogs 18-24mo age.

To date, the veterinary profession has not taken the problem of obesity seriously enough. For example, veterinary surgeons infrequently record weight and body condition during veterinary consultations,7 and rarely record the fact that a dog is overweight or obese in their clinical notes.8 In our opinion, veterinary professionals can help to reverse the current trend by focusing on prevention, while continuing to dedicate their time to successfully managing obesity when already developed.9 Proactive monitoring of bodyweight and body condition throughout life would be fundamental to any such preventive plan.10 Given the prevalence of overweight in growing dogs, bodyweight monitoring should start at initial vaccinations and continue throughout the early life phase. Such an approach is facilitated by the availability of evidence-based growth charts, for example those recently produced for dogs weighing up to 40 kg,11 and freely available for use by veterinary professionals (<https://www.waltham.com/resources/puppy-growth-charts/>).

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