ANIMAL HOARDING
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TALKING POINTS
- The psychology of animal hoarding
- Recognising animal hoarders
- Focus on cat hoarding cases
- Intervention and response
- Outcomes

TYPES OF HOARDING
OBJECTS
ANIMALS
**WHEN THE HUMAN – ANIMAL BOND BREAKS**

Positive and beneficial relationship

One sided, harmful to people and animals

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**DEFINITION – ANIMAL HOARDER***

- A person who accumulates a number of animals**
- Fails to provide minimal standards of care

*Used to be called “animal collector”
** definition does not include an exact number; focus is on QOL and care

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**DEFINITION – ANIMAL HOARDER**

- Fails to act or recognise the deteriorating condition of the animals and the environment
  - Disease, starvation, overcrowding and unsanitary
- Fails to see the impact on their own health and well-being
**DEFINITION – ANIMAL HOARDER**

- Fails to see the negative impact on others in the home

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**PEOPLE LIVING IN SQUALOR**

**PEOPLE WITH OCD**

**ANIMAL HOARDERS**

**COMPULSIVE HOARDERES**

**PEOPLE WHO LIVE WITH COMPANION ANIMALS**

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**NOT THE FOLLOWING …**

- Feral cat caretakers
- Breeders
- Multiple pet households
- Legitimate animal rescue groups

- Some cat “sanctuaries” have turned into hoarding situations
  - Florida, USA
ANIMAL HOARDING
- Not a new problem
- Global problem
  - Reported in almost every country
  - USA
  - UK
  - Japan
  - Brazil
  - India
  - South Africa

OFTEN STEREOTYPED

AWARENESS
- Public and professional awareness has increased due to media attention
HOW COMMON IS IT?

- US data
  - 5.3 hoarding cases per 100,000 people / year
  - Animals involved in about 30% of cases
  - 75% of animal cases involve dogs* or cats
  - > 3,000 - 5,000 reported cases / year
  - If 50 animals involved per case
    - ~ 250,000 animals/year

* Males more likely to hoard dogs

ANIMAL HOARDING

- Cats are very common
  - Contributes to the stereotype
- Easily available in every community
- Easier to conceal

HOW MANY CATS GLOBALLY?
HOARDERS - WHO ARE THEY? 

**DEMOGRAPHICS**
- 76-78% are women
- 72-73% are single, divorced or widowed
- 38-46% are > age 60
  - Starts in their 30’s and progresses with each decade

Data from Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium (HARC)

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WHO ARE THEY? **DEMOGRAPHICS**
- Often well educated
- All income levels
- Many are in “caring” professions
  - Nurses, doctors, animal related work
- 44-52% are unemployed/retired or disabled
- Large number have a relative with a similar problem

Data from Hoarding of Animals Research Consortium (HARC)

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**ANIMAL HOARDERS CHARACTERISTICS**
- Preoccupied with their animals
  - Takes up most of their time and money
  - Excessive emotional attachments to animals
  - No hobbies
- Very little contact with “outsiders”
- May choose animals over close relatives
- Secretive
**ANIMAL HOARDERS CHARACTERISTICS**

- Neglect of health and hygiene
  - Personal
  - Animal
- Neglect of property
  - Decay, disrepair, accumulation of inanimate objects
  - Essential amenities unavailable
    - Sinks, showers etc...

**NEGLECT OF PROPERTY**

**ANIMAL HOARDERS CHARACTERISTICS**

- Feelings of persecution
  - Animal control agencies are seen as the enemy
- Refuse outside help
- Contempt for veterinarians
  - Claim to have special esoteric knowledge of animals and how to care for them
- May claim magical abilities to communicate with animals
ANIMAL HOARDERS CHARACTERISTICS

- Denial of their behaviour
- Minimising the problems
- Excuses
- Often claim they are “rescuers”
- Almost never try to adopt animals out

CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

- In dysfunctional families children may use a pet as an object of love and care as a means of escape and as a substitute for parents who are absent or reject them

Adapted from Nathanson and Patronek
BEHAVIOURS & TRAITS LEADING TO IMPAIRED JUDGMENT AND ACTIONS

- DIFFICULTY UNDERSTANDING ANIMAL NEEDS
- MISPERCEPTION OF SITUATION & CONSEQUENCES
- LACK OF INSIGHT
- UNABLE TO REASON ABOUT OPTIONS AND COURSE OF ACTION
- FAULTY SELF-GOVERNANCE
- RELEVANT CLINICAL DIAGNOSIS
- COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

FUNCTIONAL DEFICITS

- INCOMPETENT CARE
- ANIMAL SUFFERING
- ANIMAL CRUELTY

COMPROMISED WELFARE

Freedom from hunger & thirst
Freedom from fear and distress
Freedom from discomfort and disease
Freedom to express normal behaviors
Freedom to engage in species-typical activities
Freedom to be close to conspecifics
Freedom to be physically intact
Freedom to develop and exhibit normal behaviors

- High quality of life
- Good quality of life
- Borderline quality of life
- Poor quality of life
- A life not worth living

- Yes
- No
- +/-

Compromised welfare

Cruelty typically prosecuted

- Always
- Often
- Rarely
- Infrequently
- Never

competent caregiving, welfare safeguarded, nurturing environment
borderline caregiving, animals at risk
incompetent caregiving, animals suffer

Nutrition, shelter, disease, pain, injury, illness, trauma, stress, fear, pain.
WELFARE ISSUES
- Stress and decreased resistance to infection
- Infectious disease(s)
  - Upper respiratory tract infections
- GI diseases
- Severe eye infections
- Oral ulcers
- Parasite infestation - external, internal
- Anaemia

WELFARE ISSUES
- Diarrhoea
- Infected wounds, pain
- Lack of exercise
  - Muscle wastage, sores
- Starvation
- Dehydration

PSYCHOLOGICAL CLASSIFICATION
Axis I - clinical disorders
- Bipolar
- Phobias
- Schizophrenia
- Eating disorders
- Substance abuse

Axis II - other disorders
- Personality disorders
- Developmental disorders
OTHER (ADDITIONAL) PSYCHIATRIC ISSUES

- Borderline personality
- Antisocial personality
- Depression
- Addictions
- Münchausen by proxy

HOARDING DISORDER

  - A new stand alone disorder
  - No longer classified as OCD
  - Therapy – still in its infancy
  - No long term studies

  Mataix-Cols et al 2010; Depression and Anxiety 27: 556-72

TYPES OF HOARDING

- Overwhelmed caregivers
- Rescue hoarder
- Exploiter hoarder
OVERWHELMED CAREGIVER
- Aware of some of the problems
- Animals are family – strong attachment
- Minimise but do not deny the problem
- Less secretive
- More likely to agree to help

EXPLOITER
- Collects animals for their own psychological needs
- Usually have sociopathic or personality disorder
- Extreme denial
- Reject any outside help
- Manipulative, lie, actively evade the law

RESCUE HOARDER
- Oppose euthanasia
- “no kill” philosophy
- No such thing as a life not worth living
- Their mission is “to save animals”
- Actively acquire animals
- Animals come in but do not leave
**RESCUE HOARDER**
- May be a registered charity
- Believe that they have the unique ability to care for animals
- Often have a network of enablers
- Litigious

**RESCUE HOARDER**
- Often are, or were supported by local agencies and the public
- Public sympathy
- Situation may not be severe enough for social services or prosecutors to become involved

**COMMON EXCUSES FOR THE SITUATION**
- The animals just got there
- They arrived like this
- “I have an injury so cannot clean or feed etc…”
- The hospice argument
**INDICATORS OF HOARDING**

- Unwilling to say how many pets are in the home
- Using a surrogate pet to get medication for others
- Seeking medication refills without bringing the pet to the clinic
- Claiming to have just found the pet in bad condition

**INDICATORS OF HOARDING**

- Traveling long distances for care
- Perfuming to conceal odours
- Showing an interest in acquiring other animals
- Visits for problems related to poor preventative health care
- Rarely bringing in the same animal

**REPETITION OF BEHAVIOUR**

- Without intervention and lifelong supervision almost all hoarders resume their behaviour
- Many will move to a new location and start again
INTERVENTION

- mental health professionals
- veterinarians
- public health
- Legal / law enforcement
- other agencies/forensics

Successful intervention

INTERVENTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF HOARDER</th>
<th>PERSUASION</th>
<th>THREAT OF LEGAL ACTION</th>
<th>PROSECUTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OVERWHELMED CAREGIVER</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>OFTEN NOT NEEDED</td>
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<td>EXPLOITER</td>
<td>✗</td>
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<td>USUALLY NEEDED</td>
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<tr>
<td>RESCUE HOARDER</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>![ ]</td>
<td>MAY BE NEEDED</td>
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WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF INTERVENTION?

- Care for people at risk
  - Child and elder neglect may also be present (10-15% of cases)
  - Zoonotic diseases
- Mandatory long-term psychiatric care and monitoring
  - Relapse prevention
WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF INTERVENTION?
- Probation, no contact with animals order
- Care for all the animals
  - Medical care, adoption, euthanasia

PROSECUTION
- Is essential for a successful outcome in many cases
- The majority of animal hoarders are found competent to stand trial

RESPONSE
- Trained personnel
- Dangerous conditions – “Hazmat”
  - Zoonotic diseases
  - Ammonia
  - Fungal fragments
- Gathering of evidence (forensics)
  - Essential for prosecution
  - Treated like a crime scene
**RESPONSE**

- Expensive
- Resources
  - Where will the animals go?
- Manpower
- Multiple agencies involved
  - Must be coordinated
- Must engage law enforcement
  - Animal issues may not be a high priority

**LARGE SCALE DISASTER**

*Incident command response*

[Diagram of incident command response](http://vet.tufts.edu/hoarding/intervention.htm)

**RESPONSE**

[Image of people interacting with animals]
CASES

ANIMAL PLANET
HTTP://ANIMAL.DISCOVERY.COM/TV/CONFESSIONS-ANIMAL-HOARDING/

HAVEN ACRES CAT SANCTUARY,
ALACHUA COUNTY, FLORIDA, USA
CARE GUIDELINES – ANIMAL CONTROL ASSOCIATION

- 10-15 minutes per animal per day
- 700 x 15 = 10500 minutes
- 10500/60 = 175 hours

RESOURCES http://vet.tufts.edu/hoarding/index.html

Founded in 1997
RESOURCES

QUESTIONS