Roadmap

- Hoarding results from a seemingly benevolent mission whose motivation is fundamentally selfish/exploitative.
- When the hoarder’s capacity to provide competent care becomes impaired, this leads to deteriorating husbandry that results in animal neglect and eventually cruelty.
- Mental health problems contribute to impairment in this competency. Hoarding requires a “psycho-legal” approach.
- Modern sensibilities about animal care are changing the way we interpret concepts like “cruelty” and “suffering”.
- There may be advantages to looking at the situation as a whole, rather than having to prove individual acts of cruelty.
- This will involve taking into account a wider range of information about a person’s capacity for animal care.
- This approach is applicable for early intervention, prosecution, and post-adjudication processes.

The first step: a case definition

- Failure to provide minimal standards of nutrition, shelter, sanitation, and veterinary care for > typical number of pets
- Inability to recognize the effects of this failure on welfare of animals, human members of the household and the environment
- Denial or minimization of the problems
- Obsessive attempts to accumulate or maintain a collection of animals in the face of deteriorating conditions

Frequency of animal hoarding

- Survey in MA: ~ 5.3 hoarding cases /100,000 people / yr
- Animals in about one-third of cases
  - ~ 1.75 AH cases / 100,000 people /yr
  - ~500 cases/yr in the US (reported!)
  - @50 animals/case, ~ 250,000 per year

Who are animal hoarders?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Study 1*</th>
<th>Study 2**</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(n=54)</td>
<td>(n=60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single, divorced, widowed</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt; 60 yrs of age</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed, retired, disabled</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pet Abuse.com: 1204/1698 cases (70.9%) female
608/1698 cases (35.8%) male

*Patronek, VP Animal Welfare, Animal Rescue League of Boston
**HARC, Hlth & Soc Work 2000

http://www.tufts.edu/vet/hoarding/
Hoarders cross all social and economic strata

“A handful of cats and dogs, fur matted and unkempt, walked aimlessly amid piles of animal feces that in parts of the house was nearly knee high. Twenty-three pets were decomposing inside, some so badly that the authorities could not tell whether they were cat or dog. Animals were neglected for years by an upper middle-class couple in a home valued at $2.4 million. So much feces had accumulated in the basement — as much as 14 inches deep — that workers wore protective suits and put Vicks VapoRub on their particle masks to ward off the smell.”

A sentinel for child (& elder) neglect

Hundreds of animals rescued in Missouri

360 animals, many of them emaciated, injured and suffering mange, have been rescued from a southwest Missouri property where they were hoarded and bred. Six children, ages 1 through 11, were removed from the property by state welfare workers. The property owner was charged with two counts of felony child endangerment over living conditions that were described as the worst seen by the investigator in 16 years of public service. Authorities described a scene of from 12 to 15 house trailers stacked to the ceilings with junk, trash and debris, crawling with cockroaches, with water provided only by a series of garden hoses linked together.

Why animals?

“A child who has been forced to love and care for a pet or pets is learning there is a bond between themselves and another living thing; that they can expect that bond to be there even in times of crisis.”

Understand the bond

Childhood experience with pets

“As Rynearson suggests, children in dysfunctional families may use the pet, which is consistently receptive as an object of love and care as a means of escape, and as a substitute for human relationships, particularly when parents are absent or rejecting.”

Compulsive caregiving

“We don’t have relationships; we take hostages”

—Anonymous AA member

“Addiction is the attachment disorder”

—Flores 2004

“None escapes the need for satisfying relationships, and the degree to which we are unable to form healthy interpersonal intimacy determines the degree to which we are vulnerable to substitute substances [?animals?] for human closeness.”

—Anonymous AA member
When control is threatened....

- When attachment/control based strategies for coping collapse under stress, people can experience dissociative states.
- Reality becomes temporarily dissociated so that unpleasant events or events that threaten control or self-image are not experienced.
- Stated beliefs may contradict reality, even without delusional or affective disorders.

Early childhood experience (neglectful, abusive, inconsistent parenting) and/or genetic, fetal, psychosocial, environmental factors

Evidence of mental health problems in animal hoarding

- Irrational/magical thinking
- Denial of reality/lack of insight
- Squalor and lack of self-care
- Suspiciousness/paranoia
- Harming of people (children, elders)
- Persistence despite consequences
- Court recognition of need for treatment

Arguments for a psycho-legal approach to hoarding

Explanations, theories, & confounding factors
Complicated grief and the role of triggering events

• A pathological grief reaction with symptoms resembling PTSD
• May be associated with extreme fears of abandonment
• Signs consistent with complicated grief observed in many animal hoarders
• Hoarding often associated with a traumatic triggering event in adulthood
• Feelings of loss mitigated through compulsive caregiving

Axis I vs. Axis II disorders

Axis I: Clinical disorders
• Schizophrenia
• Anxiety
• Depression
• Bipolar
• Substance abuse disorder
• Phobias
• Eating disorders
• Sleep disorders
• Delusional disorder
• Cognitive disorders

Axis II: Other disorders
• Developmental disorders
• Autism
• Personality disorders

Personality and Personality Disorder (PD)

• PDs are maladaptive, function-impairing extremes of normal personality traits.
• PDs are defined as an enduring pattern of inner experience and behavior that is pervasive, inflexible and stable over time.
• Debated as to whether they are “diseases” because the behaviors are so innate to the person and difficult to modify or “cure”.
• Personality style, in combination with age (and other issues), can compromise functioning to a much greater degree than cognitive assessment scores suggest.
• Neuropsychological exam / psychometric tests may uncover these contributing factors.

Hoarding Disorder: A new diagnosis in DSM-V?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ego-dystonic</th>
<th>Ego-syntonic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Repetitive, intrusive thoughts that are unpleasant</td>
<td>Hoarding part of normal strain of thought and activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urge to perform repetitive rituals</td>
<td>No urge to perform repetitive rituals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associated with unpleasant emotions</td>
<td>Associated with feelings of pleasure and sometimes purpose in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possessions themselves may cause distress</td>
<td>Possessions or thinking about them pleasurable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symptoms stable over life course</td>
<td>Symptoms worsen over life course</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Matais-Cols et al, 2010; Pertusa et al 2010
Its not black and white

Potential for telemedicine

The animal welfare component

Animal well-being is determined by the interaction of animals with each other, with their caregivers, and with their environment.

An emerging consensus on care

The Association of Shelter Veterinarians
Shelter Standards Project
Background and Introduction
Foundation of the shelter standards project

1. Freedom from Hunger and Thirst - by ready access to fresh water and diet to maintain health and vigor.
2. Freedom from Discomfort - by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
3. Freedom from Pain, Injury or Disease - by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.
4. Freedom to Express Normal Behavior - by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.
5. Freedom from Fear and Distress - by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

http://www.fawc.org.uk/freedoms.htm

Overview of Content

- Operational Issues (Policies, Protocols, Record Keeping)
- Facility Design and Environment (Primary enclosures, HVAC, Light, Sound)
- Population Management (Capacity for Care, Monitoring Statistics)
- Sanitation (Cleaning, Disinfection, Waste Control)
- Medical Health and Physical Well-Being (Preventive health care, emergency care, pain, nutrition, response to disease/illness, population well-being)
- Behavioral Health and Mental Well-Being (Intake, evaluation, in-shelter care, stress reduction, enrichment, behavior modification)
- Group Housing
- Animal Handling
- Euthanasia (Technique, environment and equipment, record keeping, staff training)
- Spay-Neuter
- Animal Transport (Responsibilities at origin, during transport, at destination)
- Public Health (Zoonoses, Aerial-related injuries, emerging diseases)

Options for intervention

- Prosecution? Prosecution? Prosecution? Prosecution?
- Threaten legal action? Threaten legal action? Threaten legal action? Threaten legal action?
- Get the animals out? Get the animals out? Get the animals out? Get the animals out?
- Therapeutic approach? Therapeutic approach? Therapeutic approach? Therapeutic approach?

A disaster-type response is required

- Disease exposure
  - Lack of hardwashing facilities
  - Inhalation, ingestion, contact, vectors
- Air quality
  - Ammonia
  - Particulate matter
  - Mold
- Injuries
  - Poor lighting
  - Crowding/debris
  - Animals
  - Structural damage to dwelling
  - Occupant

Health risks for responders

Adapted from a diagram by Diana Yu, MD

Association of Shelter Veterinarians
The scoop on ammonia

- A colorless gas with high water solubility that is produced by the decomposition of urine and feces
- Human occupational exposure limits set at 25 – 50 ppm TWA 8 hr day for “pure” ammonia, typically industrial chemicals
- This is different from animal housing and NOT an indicator of sanitation
- Shelters and kennels should be <1-2 ppm
- Concentrated animal feeding operations (factory farms) if maintained to industry standards <10 ppm
- Hoarder homes have been measured at ~>150 ppm
- Ammonia from animal waste acts synergistically with organic dusts and may be much more hazardous
- 300 ppm is IDLH concentration – evacuate!

Personal protective equipment

- Gloves
- Gown or coveralls
- Eye protection
- Footwear
- Caps
- Respiratory protection
- Hearing protection
- All disinfectable or disposable

Overwhelmed caregiver

- Some awareness, more reality-based
- More passive acquisition
- Problems often triggered by change in circumstance
- Unable to problem-solve effectively
- Animals are family members
- Likely to be socially isolated
- Self-esteem linked to role as caregiver
- Fewer issues with authorities

Rescuer Hoarder

- Mission leading to unavoidable compulsions
- Fear of death
- “Active vs. passive acquisition
- “She is the only one who can provide care
- “Rescue followed by adoption becomes rescue-only care
- “May have extensive network of enablers or be a group activity

Exploiter Hoarder

- Tends to have sociopathic characteristics
- Lacks empathy for people or animals
- Indifferent to harm caused
- Rejents outsiders’ concerns
- Superficial charm and charisma
- Lacks guilt or remorse
- Manipulative and cunning
- Adopts role of expert with need to control

Match intervention to type of hoarder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Hoarder</th>
<th>General approach / strategy</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overwhelmed caregiver</td>
<td>Most likely to be resistant to help and domineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rescuer</td>
<td>Unlikely, at least in the initial stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploiter</td>
<td>Probably most suggestions with contempt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table adapted from Animal hoarding: Structuring interdisciplinary responses to help people, animals, and communities at risk. Patronek, Loar, Nathanson, eds. 2006
Merits of task force with multidisciplinary approach

- At risk individuals tend to fall in gaps between agencies
- Confidentiality laws are an impairment to coordination of case management
- Task forces are one way to mitigate some of these barriers
- Combined influence of authority from multiple agencies may be greater than any agency acting alone
- No single agency is likely to have all of the resources needed
Factors to consider in competency to provide care for animals

- **Intrinsic capacity of situation**
  - Physical environment
  - Food and water
  - General health of population
  - Adequacy of support from others (staff, volunteers)

- **Responsiveness to needs**
  - Recognition of need for veterinary care
  - Recognition of normal vs. abnormal animal behavior
  - Recognition of sources and expression of stress, discomfort, suffering (Quality of life)
  - Provision of socialization
  - Consistency of attending to these needs

- **Caregiver history**
  - Training, experience
  - Organizational stability and transparency
  - Previous infractions
  - Successes

- **Caregiver traits**
  - Judgment & reasoning
  - Decisional capacity
  - Understand and remember important information
  - Appreciate consequences of choices (cause/effect)
  - Ability to empathize
  - Psychological diagnoses