

## OPINION

# Abolish rabid policy

By Joel Joseph

ON SEPT. 28, people around the globe will unite to recognize World Rabies Day with the goal of one day wiping rabies off the face of the earth. This fatal disease continues to take the lives of thousands of people (55,000 per year) – and animals – worldwide. Veterinarians hold the key to protecting domestic animals and the general public from rabies. They can help save lives by educating clients about rabies prevention, assuring that local animal health agencies do their jobs, serving as expert resources on responsible pet ownership, and assuring that proper procedures are performed.

People most frequently think of rabies as being associated with dogs. However, the number of rabies-infected cats was almost four times that of rabies-infected dogs, according to a new report from the American Veterinary Medical Association (data collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). In order to monitor rabies – the results from laboratory samples for variant typing (the different types of rabies) are the key essential components of rabies prevention and control programs. Accurate and timely information is required to guide post-bite treatment in humans and in discovering new emerging pathogens (new variants).

It is an internationally recognized standard that animals in rabies-free designated areas, like Hawaii, Japan, Saipan/CNMI, the FSM, and other islands should not be vaccinated for rabies. Vaccinating in rabies-free areas has the ability to alter and/or deflect – falsely – information needed to produce proper rabies control programs worldwide. Please note that Guam is not on this list. That is because GovGuam authorities, under the direction of the GovGuam Territorial Veterinarian – Dr. Thomas Poole – seem to want Guam kept as their own personal economic resource and a backward third world country or worse.

There is no medical or public health reason to require rabies vaccinations once on Guam. Nor is there any reason to require vaccination or the quarantine procedures endured by Guam citizens when transporting animals to and from Japan, CNMI, or other rabies-free islands. However,

there must be reasons why these policies still endure and these reasons are easy to see.

First, the GovGuam Department of Agriculture collects money from the dog rabies licenses and they do not care to relinquish these funds. The department fails to remember that these license fees come from the individual taxpayers. We can argue about \$5 increases in drivers' license fees and get government action – but try to take away a useless, outdated license like this and nothing happens.

What is even more incredulous is that only dogs are required to have licenses, when it is cats that spread rabies and have rabies in higher proportions. Thus, we have an outdated procedure that makes Guam look like a pariah on the world and it is improperly applied. I wish the new agriculture director the best of luck on this and other issues.

Second, GovGuam Territorial Veterinarian Dr. Thomas Poole, works for at least three of the civilian veterinary clinics (just a minor conflict of interest?). In sworn testimony he stated he could not fathom why anyone would give up income from rabies vaccinations, as it is so profitable and easy to do. Thus, our government officials are now making extra money from the entire procedure at the expense of Guam citizens (are you surprised?).

Third, Guam's civilian dog quarantine center makes money from the present GovGuam rabies policies. Coincidentally, the territorial veterinarian has been employed by the owner of the quarantine center (major conflict of interest!).

On this World Rabies Day, I ask the good citizens of Guam, our senators (plus those who desire our votes next year), and people of good conscience to extricate Guam from this situation. Immediately abolish the on-island rabies vaccination requirements. Promote proper animal transport between our neighboring islands. Open and allow competing civilian quarantine centers. Bring Guam up to the standards of a first world nation. Stop blatant corruption in regards to the animals.

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