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FORUM FIVE — Finding a way home

Fast and consistent recovery of lost pets can save owners and their families much anxiety and heartache. Here **Linda Lord**, DVM, PhD, assistant professor in the department of veterinary preventive medicine at The Ohio State University, discusses the impact that microchipping and identification can have on helping Fido or Boots get back home.



Linda Lord, DVM, PhD

1. Did last year's news reports linking microchips to cancer have any negative impact on microchipping?

No. I think it is important for people to remember that the few studies showing a link between microchips and cancer have been conducted on mice and rats only. The species used in the studies may be more susceptible to tumors because of genetic predisposition or the increased surface area of the foreign body relative to the size of the animal. In the approximately 10 years of monitoring adverse reactions from microchips, the British Small Animal Veterinary Association has reported that of the more than 4 million pets in the United Kingdom that have been microchipped, only two have been associated with tumors. The general consensus is that the benefits of microchipping far outweigh any potential health risks.

2. What can be done to increase microchipping compliance in the United States?

Approximately 5% of the pets in the United States are microchipped, so there is plenty of room for improvement in compliance. I think both owners and veterinarians can contribute to increasing the prevalence. Pet owners often believe microchipping is unnecessary because they think their pets won't become lost, yet we know that indoor-only cats can and do become lost. In one study we conducted, we found that 41% of owners searching for their lost cats had kept their cats strictly indoors. Similar barriers exist for dog owners. Veterinarians can help by promoting microchipping during wellness exams. Identification — both microchipping and visual identification — should be part of the discussion during a wellness exam.

3. How important is frequency standardization to finding lost pets through microchipping?

I think that standardization is a critical issue in the United States. Throughout much of the world, the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standard of 134.2 kHz for radio frequency identification (RFID) devices has been adopted and implemented as the preferred or sole RFID technology for companion animals. The international standard would help remove much of the confusion among both veterinarians and owners. There are universal microchip scanners on the market, however, that have high sensitivities in reading all frequencies of microchips currently sold in the United States.

4. Many shelters require sterilization of pets before adoption. Are they taking the same stance with microchipping?

There is definitely a trend for animal shelters to microchip all adopted animals before they leave the shelter. In some communities, this is required legally. I think it is a positive step toward increasing the prevalence of microchipping and really has no negative impact on veterinarians. In fact, you could look at this in a positive

light when you consider that keeping the pet in a home also keeps the pet as a patient of the veterinarian.

5. How can the veterinarian best address lost pet recovery plans in the first few puppy or kitten visits?

Ideally, veterinarians could include information on lost pet recovery in the puppy and kitten packets that they give to new owners. By addressing the importance of identification, veterinarians also can convince owners that identification tags and microchipping are integral to the pet's health. Pet owners are most receptive to these concepts with a new pet. Beyond the puppy and kitten visits, veterinarians can scan the pet at each visit to remind clients that a chip is present and to check if contact information has changed and needs to be updated with the microchip registry. We need to remember that losing a pet is a traumatic experience, and preparation can save the pet's life.