

Couper Geysen

FAMILY AND ANIMAL LAW



Our ref: TLG:TAJ:A:BR:02014

Your ref:

22 June 2016

The Chairperson
Veterinary Surgeons Board of Queensland
GPO Box 46
BRISBANE QLD 4001

By email: vsbqld@daf.qld.gov.au

Dear Chairperson

Animal law matter

We act for Maria Kuljanic in relation to issues pertaining to the treatment of her cat Princess.

We are instructed to formalise complaints on behalf of our client in relation to:

1. the treatment provided to our client's cat Princess by Veterinary Specialist Services at Springwood;
2. the education and training provided to veterinary students by University of Queensland and James Cook University;
3. the incorrect dietary advice provided by Queensland veterinarians to carers of cats and dogs; and
4. the ongoing enmeshment of universities and veterinarians with commercial pet food corporations.

Veterinary Specialist Services Springwood (VSS)

We are instructed as follows:

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- In 2013 our client presented her cat Princess to her local pet hospital with feline obesity.
 - Princess was prescribed Royal Canin Weight Loss Management sachets and the veterinarian advised our client to keep feeding her this product, despite that Princess continued to gain weight on this formula.
 - Regular weigh-ins at her local pet hospital over the next 12 months established that Princess continued to gain weight while being fed the Royal Canin weight loss diet.
 - In April 2014 our client presented her cat Princess to her local pet hospital where she was then diagnosed with Type 2 Feline Diabetes.
 - This progression from feline obesity to diabetes occurred despite that our client stringently followed the diet prescribed for Princess by her veterinarian.
 - Princess was then prescribed a Hills m/d diet consisting of both wet and dry formulas.
 - Princess underwent numerous 12 hour blood glucose curves at her local veterinary hospital and during home visits by her veterinarian, beginning with 3 units of insulin and increasing to 3.5 units by 21 May 2014.
 - On 16 June 2014 our client presented her cat Princess to Dr Danielle Bowles at VSS after failed attempts by several local veterinarians to control Princess' diabetes.
 - Princess was diagnosed by VSS with obesity, fatty liver disease and uncontrolled diabetes.
 - Notably, our client was not advised at this stage that Princess was suffering periodontal disease, despite that this later proved to be the case, and our client later learned of the intimate relationship between a commercial pet food diet, obesity, diabetes and periodontal disease.
 - Princess was admitted as an inpatient for three days at VSS from 16 to 18 June while undergoing a series of more sophisticated blood glucose curves using a human grade hospital monitor at a cost of \$400 per day for the monitor alone.
 - During her stay at VSS, Princess was force-fed Hills m/d by hand as she refused to eat the formula by herself.
 - She remained on insulin and her dosage was increased to 4 units on 18 June 2014 at the time of hospital discharge.
 - On her return home our client saw no improvement in Princess' condition whilst she continued to remain on the prescribed Hills m/d diet.
 - Our client continued to attend numerous one hour consultations for Princess at VSS and other local vet clinics during the next six months, where Princess' treatment included undergoing expensive tests to eliminate other underlying diseases which may or may not have contributed to Princess' uncontrolled diabetes.
 - During the 2014/2015 financial year our client sought assistance from approximately 20 veterinarians either at their clinics or in paid home consults to conduct blood glucose curves.
 - Further IDEXX tests were performed including kidney, feline aids, three bladder tests and acromegaly.

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- Every veterinarian our client had consulted to that date recommended a Hills m/d diet.
 - When our client expressed concerns about its effectiveness after having tried it for over 6 months while Princess' health continued to deteriorate, veterinarians all encouraged her, claiming they have had 'wonderful results' from using this diet.
 - None of the approximately 20 veterinarians consulted by our client provided her with the option of feeding Princess a raw diet.
 - All veterinarians advised our client to keep increasing the insulin dosage whilst Princess was still using the Hills m/d diet.
 - No veterinarians advised our client to feed a more 'species appropriate' diet.
 - It is now clear to our client that Princess was suffering from insulin resistance which was caused by her feline obesity and the consumption of the wrong types of calories in the commercial diet.
 - During this period of time our client complained on several occasions to Dr Bowles in relation to Princess not eating the Hills m/d.
 - VSS sold and prescribed only Hills Science pet food, and Dr Bowles advised our client that this was the only product available whilst a patient remained within the VSS animal hospital.
 - After Princess began refusing to eat Hills m/d, Dr Bowles eventually instructed our client to feed her 'anything palatable' from the supermarket shelves, however she did not suggest a raw or species appropriate diet, or a home made diet.
 - Dr Bowles instructed our client to read the labels on the supermarket pet food brands to determine the carbohydrate load, however pet food manufacturers are not required to test or record this information accurately on their product labelling.
 - Dr Bowles then advised our client to feed 'anything palatable' from the supermarket shelves, including Whiskas and Snappy Tom – the very same diets that had caused the feline obesity from the outset.
 - Our client investigated other brands on the overseas market which contained much lower carbohydrates for felines, including Purina DM with 4.5% carbohydrates, however it was not available in Australia and attempts to import this food into Australia cost our client around \$3,000 and were ultimately unsuccessful.
 - At no time during any of the consultations with our client did Dr Bowles offer any advice in respect to alternative feeding of Princess based on a natural raw diet, and in particular she did not offer any advice in relation to feeding a species appropriate diet.
 - After conducting her own research, our client came across the following information in September 2015:
 - Dr Lisa Pierson's cat website <http://www.catinfo.org/> and
 - Dr Tom Lonsdale's website <http://www.rawmeatybones.com>
 - In January 2016 she also discovered the Dr Francis Pottenger Cats Diet 10 Year Study;

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- She learned of the benefits of a raw diet for cats and dogs, and introduced Princess to a raw diet for the first time.
 - The results that followed this simple switching of diets was remarkable and impressive, particularly given the abject failure of the previous treatments and diets prescribed by veterinarians, and in particular Dr Bowles.
 - During the next 6 months Princess progressively lost weight, shifting from 7.5 kilograms down to 6 kilograms.
 - Whilst she remained a diabetic due to the harm that had already been done to her pancreas during the previous year, it was not necessary to continue increasing her insulin dose and it remained the same.
 - Our client has since learned from veterinary literature that the best opportunity for effective treatment or reversal of feline diabetes is within the first 6 months from the time of diagnosis.
 - She is now regretful that she and Princess lost that opportunity due to the incorrect and at least incomplete veterinary advice and treatment by all veterinarians, including the specialist Dr Bowles.
 - She further regrets that Princess lost the opportunity to even experience remission from feline diabetes due to what she believes was the negligent advice provided by the veterinarians she consulted.
 - Our client has also since learned that by the time Princess was diagnosed as diabetic, after a period of feline obesity, her pancreas was completely depleted by her lifetime of consumption of excessive carbohydrates in foods such as Snappy Tom, Whiskas and Dine.
 - Princess' obesity and then diabetes were further exacerbated by the veterinarian prescribed diets of Royal Canin and Hills with their excessive levels of carbohydrates, causing her diabetes to become uncontrolled and requiring increasing insulin dosages.
 - By the end of 2015 our client had become aware of the negligence of VSS and Dr Bowles in prescribing the defective diets for Princess, and in failing to prescribe or offer the option of a raw or home made diet.
 - She was forced to consult with veterinarians in New South Wales after she was unable to obtain proper advice in Queensland on appropriate pet nutrition for felines.
 - She sought legal advice and commenced her research into this issue on an almost full time basis.
 - She developed serious concerns as the full extent of this issue became apparent to her, and the balance of this complaint relates to those concerns which she holds for the broader issues she has now uncovered.
 - In addition to her obesity and diabetes, and resulting health complications, Princess' health was further compromised by other illnesses directly linked to her vet prescribed poor diet, including periodontal disease.
 - Our client believes it is commonly known within the veterinary industry that commercial pet food formulas have a poor texture that cannot mimic nature, and which does not therefore clean teeth, protect teeth, or exercise the jaw line.

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- In early 2016, after having had most of her teeth removed, Princess was diagnosed with jaw cancer, suspected to be the result of two extensive dental procedures in August 2015 and January 2016 to remove every tooth on the gum line.
 - On 20 April 2016 Princess passed away after what our client believes was a long battle against the harm caused by an inappropriate commercial diet.

Education and training provided to veterinary students by University of Queensland and James Cook University

Our client instructs as follows:

- She has learned that education of veterinary science students in Queensland with respect to nutrition and diet for cats and dogs is incomplete, heavily biased towards commercial pet food, lacking in transparency and scientifically flawed.
- She notes that Professor Jacquie Rand and Dr Rhett Marshall at University of Queensland continue to recommend commercial processed diets with less than 20% of calories from carbohydrates for obese diabetic cats. They suggest Hills m/d and Purina DM during the calorie restriction phase. They do not at any stage suggest a raw or biologically appropriate or species appropriate natural food for diabetic cats. Their diet advice consists of recommending an exclusively commercial diet.
- Our client believes that pet owners generally have a right to know where vets get their advice from. Her attempts through the RTI process to obtain this information have been unsuccessful, with Universities claiming generally that disclosure of information in relation to the relationships between universities and commercial pet food corporations is not in the public interest.
- She is very concerned that lecturers at University of Queensland and James Cook University veterinary science faculties teach an approach to diet and nutrition for cats and dogs that focuses on the use and prescription of commercial processed foods including dry foods. Reference to raw diet is only made in order to discredit it and exclude it as a valid option for veterinary recommendation.
- She has learned that university lectures on pet nutrition are given at these universities by representatives from commercial pet food companies including Hills Science Diet, Royal Canin and Purina, and that this is very often the only form of education in this regard. The myth that commercial processed pet foods is capable of replacing nature's diet for domestic animals is perpetuated by the very people who stand to profit from the sales of these foods.
- She has also learned that there are a growing number of qualified veterinarians worldwide who have undertaken their own research and learned of the vast benefits of a raw or species appropriate diet for dogs and cats. They include Dr Lisa Pierson (USA), Dr Tom Lonsdale (Australia), Dr Karen Becker (USA), Dr Breck Muir (Australia), Dr FR Marx (Brazil), and Dr Richard Malik (Australia) and Dr Michael Fox (USA), Dr Bruce Syme (Australia) and Dr Francis M Pottenger , a medical doctor for humans (USA). They are creditable and published experts who base their opinions on facts, science and research. They are

passionate and dedicated in the work they do and the education of others in the profession and the community. Despite this, discussion by lecturers in universities in relation to raw or species appropriate diets is confined to ridicule and criticism, while students are herded continually towards the very same commercial pet foods they will profit from as practicing veterinarians.

- Our client believes that so long as Queensland's universities continue to educate and train vet students in this way, veterinarians will continue to provide incorrect, inadequate and incomplete advice to carers of pets in relation to proper diet and nutrition for cats and dogs, particularly in response to preventable conditions such as obesity, diabetes and periodontal disease.
- Our client implores the VSB and Minister to adopt an open minded approach to this issue, to be cautious of claims made by those who manufacture and sell commercial pet foods, and to permit and encourage transparent and dedicated research into this issue and unbiased education and training by our universities of veterinary science students, veterinarians and the community.

Dietary advice provided by veterinarians

Our client instructs that in the course of her research she has established the following facts and science based theories in relation to commercial processed foods being fed and prescribed to cats and dogs.

Hills m/d contains 15.7% carbohydrates. It is uncontroversial that carbohydrates have a direct impact on blood sugar levels. While the type 2 diabetes crisis is now well documented in humans, it seems that veterinarians are ignoring the very same issue in our pets. Obesity, diabetes and periodontal disease are inextricably and intimately linked health issues for cats and dogs, and are all in turn interlinked with diet and nutrition.

Processed commercial pet foods contain ingredients that are unnecessary for cats and dogs, and possibly harmful, including plant based carbohydrates from corn, wheat, grain, and soy-beans.

In addition, processed pet foods are usually cooked which alters the foods chemical structure, destroys nutritional content and forces the pancreas to work harder. The dry foods in particular contain fibres comprised in most cases of peanut hulls, almond shells, empty grain hulls, beet pulp and other ingredients that provide no nutritional value to dogs or cats.

Processed commercial pet foods contain preservatives, artificial colouring, chemical binders to keep the food formed, and unhealthy fats and sugars to make them palatable. These ingredients have no logical place in a cat's diet.

Dry foods for dogs and cats, even allegedly 'premium' prescription dry food is particularly harmful for diabetic animals due to the protein and carbohydrate percentages. These foods are species inappropriate for cats due to their low thirst drive, and particularly inappropriate for cats with feline diabetes as they require higher amounts of water intake. These dry food are major contributors to the epidemic of urinary tract issues suffered by domestic cats.

Commercial processed foods need to do more than contain the essential recipe of nutrients required by the animals. This does not meet the animal's needs that are met by the tearing and chewing actions, the gnawing on bones, and the periods of starvation.

Our client is of the view that even if a small percentage of what she has learned about commercial processed pet foods is true, then conscientious veterinarians and our Queensland universities ought to be alarmed and concerned and rethinking the advice they provide to pet owners each day.

Enmeshment of universities and veterinarians with commercial pet food companies

Our client believes that the enmeshment of our universities and veterinarians with commercial pet food companies is having devastating and detrimental health consequences for our pets, and compromises the integrity of the veterinary profession as a whole.

She has learned that University of Queensland and James Cook University each have improper relationships with the Hill's Science Diet corporation.

Commercial pet food companies provide funding for bursaries, scholarships, prizes, studies and research in the universities. Each day veterinary science students are exposed to logos, teachings, merchandise, studies, documents and other references to commercial pet food companies.

Our client instructs that Professor Jacquie Rand is conducting a 2016 University of Queensland study 'Feline obesity, nutrition and diabetes'. She would like to ask who is funding this study? Will the raw diet be used or excluded from this study? What is the food source used in the study – and more importantly what is the food source used in the baseline for animals involved in the study? Our client is concerned that this study will be another missed opportunity for making real scientific discoveries that will improve the welfare of domestic animals in Australia.

Commercial pet food companies have become conglomerate owners of veterinary practices. Veterinarians should therefore be required by regulation to provide consumers with a choice in relation to dietary and nutrition advice and products. This will ensure the integrity of advice provided by a veterinarian employed at a practice which is owned by a commercial pet food corporation. Currently there is nothing to require even disclosure of the relationship between the veterinary practice and the commercial pet food companies.

Our client believes that patients should not be referred exclusively to Hill's or any other commercial food diet as was the case with Princess and VSS. Veterinarians should be mandated to offer advice in relation to the feeding option of a raw food diet and any variations in order to ensure the integrity of the profession and impartiality despite the overwhelming financial rewards they gain both directly and indirectly from commercial pet food companies.

On 2 February 2016 our client called VSS and spoke to the Manager David Simpler asking about their policy on raw diet. He stated they have nothing in writing but they have an internal policy

on raw diet. When our client asked why she was not offered the raw diet option for Princess Mr Simpler could not answer.

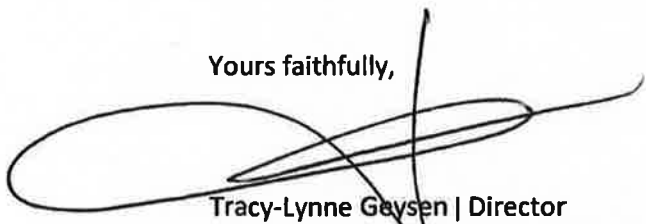
Our client is concerned that if the research and opinions developed by many hundreds of independent veterinarians worldwide is true, and commercial pet foods are in fact a junk diet, and raw diets are essential to healthy cats and dogs, then the implications of this are overwhelming in many different aspects.

If this is the case, all research carried out in relation to cats and dogs in relatively recent times is seriously flawed. This is because all research assumes that animals the subject of the studies are breathing air, drinking water and eating food that is adequate, safe and suitable. This is the platform from where all research is conducted. If the food presumed as safe, adequate and suitable is in fact inappropriate and harmful, then results of all studies conducted on these animals will be flawed.

Our client finds most ironic and offensive the fact that veterinarians and commercial pet food companies operate in a symbiotic relationship where vets recommend the food that makes the animals sick, and when they return to the vet, the vet prescribes the food that makes the animals sick, and the cycle of over servicing by veterinarians continues. Inherent in this equation is the equally harmful fact that at no time do vets inform pet owners of the possibility that the commercial pet foods may be harming their pets, and provide them with an option for a prescribed diet based on raw diet or species appropriate nutrition.

Our client believes there are now good reasons for the veterinary industry and associated government regulators to take steps to ensure that commercial pet food manufacturers are legally required to place warnings on commercial pet food labels that alert pet owners to the dangers of feeding their animals this diet. She believes that pet owners should have the right to make an educated choice about how they feed their pets, free from the pressure exerted by commercial pet food corporations and the consequent inadequate advice provided by their trusted veterinarians.

Yours faithfully,



Tracy-Lynne Geysen | Director
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