



**ARTICLE**

## **Raise Pet Owners' Awareness on the Importance of Their Pets' Oral Health and Reduce Pet Abandonment Cases in Korea**

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**TITLE:** Raise Pet Owners' Awareness on the Importance of Their Pets' Oral Health and Reduce Pet Abandonment Cases in Korea

**ABSTRACT:** NA.

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The number of households raising companion animals (or pets) in South Korea is on the rise from 4.57 million in 2015 to 5.39 million in 2017 according to statistics from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. On the contrary (and surprisingly), the number of abandoned animals is also on the rapid rise from 81,147 in 2014 to 102,593 in 2017. On average, 281 pets were abandoned every day in 2017 in South Korea. One of the major reasons behind abandoning pets in Korea is expensive medical treatments. According to a 2018 National Assembly Research Service survey, there were 15,000 abandoned pets at 82 private animal care centers across the country, and many of them were found sick. This means that pet owners who cannot afford medical treatment choose to abandon their pets, which is lamentable and outrageous at the same time.

Therefore, both the private and the public organizations started making efforts to address this problem by, for example, making pet insurance programs or coming up with a standardized list of treatments. Such movements at the public sector, however, are just at the beginning stage, covering only a very small percentage of registered pets. Measures that will be the most effective as of now in Korea would be the ones that are taken by the private. There are many ways that individual pet owner can take to help their pets stay healthy: to regularly exercise them, feed them a balanced diet, vaccinate them against potentially deadly diseases, and so on. However, there is one thing that pet owners tend to neglect while taking care of their pets: pets' oral health.

Pets' oral health is very critical in that it affects everything else in their bodies from their brain, heart, liver, kidney, lung to even their skin and joints. Nevertheless, the importance of a pet's oral health is not emphasized enough in Korea. There is an organization that promotes the importance of the pet dental care in Korea: Korean Veterinary Dental Society established in 2009. This is the only organization dedicated to pets' dental care in Korea. However, this organization is not enough for the information on pets' dental care to be cascaded down to ordinary pet owners.

Therefore, I launched a small campaign on the importance of pets' oral health online as well as off-line in the hopes of raising pet owners' awareness and spreading information on how to keep pets' teeth healthy, praying that this small movement can ultimately contribute to the reduction of pet abandonment cases in Korea. The campaign results show that ordinary pet owners have very low pet dental IQ and pay little attention to the oral hygiene of their pets in Korea. After the campaign, their awareness has been heightened, but such awareness-raising campaigns need to expand further to lead to the reduction of pet abandonment cases resulted from immense medical expenses for their pets.