

Use of Shock Collars

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No, I have not changed my opinion and it is that there is never any reason for pets to be shocked as a part of therapy or treatment. If anything, I have strengthened this opinion. There are now terrific scientific and research data that show the harm that shock collars can do behaviorally.

At the July 2005 International Veterinary Behavior Meeting, held in conjunction with the AVSAB and ACVB research meetings, data were presented by E. Schalke, J. Stichnoth, and R. Jones-Baade that documented these damaging effects (Stress symptoms caused by the use of electric training collars on dogs (*Canis familiaris*) in everyday life situations. Current Issues and Research in Veterinary Behavioral Medicine, Papers presented at the 5th Int'l IVBM. Purdue University Press, 2005:139-145. [ISBN 987-1-55752-409-5; 1-558753-409- 8]).

This follows on the excellent work done by Dutch researchers, in cooperation with their working dog groups and trainers, that showed that working / patrol dogs were adversely affected by their 'training' with shock, long after the shock occurred (Schilder MBH, van der Borg JAM. Training dogs with the help of the shock collar: short and long term behavioural effects. Applied Animal Behaviour Science 2003;85:319-334).

Research meetings can be attended by anyone paying the fee, and most published work is available either in the public domain, from an organization, or from someone with a university library connection. There is no longer a reason for people to remain misinformed.

Let me make my opinion perfectly clear: Shock is not training - in the vast majority of cases it meets the criteria for abuse. In my patient population, dogs who have been 'treated' with shock have a much higher risk of an undesirable outcome (e.g., euthanasia) than dogs not subjected to shock, and I never recommend euthanasia. In all situations where shock has been used there is some damage done, even if we cannot easily see it. No pet owner needs to use this technique to achieve their goal. Dogs who cease to exhibit a problem behavior usually also cease to exhibit normal behaviors.

The only data available support the idea that shock is neither an effective nor suitable training tool. That said, it's time we replaced everyone's personal mythologies and opinions with data and scientific thinking. Such opportunities are now available, but are often not exploited.

For example, the statement: “ Major veterinary universities have tested E- collars since the mid 60’s when they were invented. No evidence of any damage, Physiological or psychological has ever been found.” is patently and wholly false. For the evidence re: data - see above. As for the initial statement - it’s WRONG. It’s a MYTH. The specialty college (ACVB) even conducted a census a few years ago to see if we could find ANY truth to this and there was NONE. We couldn’t get anyone to say that they had - or knew someone who had - participated in such tests and studies.

This pattern of behavioral repetition is representative of the danger of myth, and also of the power of the scientific method. Science tells you when you are wrong. Myth allows you to steal credibility where none is earned. That particular myth has damaged universities too long, and it has traded on the reputations of people who neither endorsed that decision, nor supported the finding, and it must stop. I hope this helps.

I have never thought we could get via electricity what we couldn’t get by advanced training and hard work.

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Dr. Karen Overall is a world-renowned animal behaviorist and researcher at the Center of Neurobiology and Behavior at University of Pennsylvania, School of Medicine. They are particularly interested in studying dogs suffering from panic, anxiety related disorders, and aggression. The above information was presented to the Association of Pet Dog Trainers e-mail list, and Both Ends of the Leash feels that this is a valuable piece of information to share with the public.