



VETERINARY SURGEONS BOARD
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

Alert: Risks of “Anaesthesia – free dentistry” services being offered to pets in the ACT.

Unfortunately we are seeing a rise in people offering so called “anaesthesia-free dentistry” in the ACT, where they offer to do “dentals” or cleaning and scaling of pets’ teeth while fully conscious. Pet owners should be aware that this is a serious risk for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the animal has to be physically restrained which can lead to significant anxiety. Because the animal is conscious, it will be fully aware of any pain involved in the procedure. This is not only stressful at the time, but can lead to longer term anxiety and aversion to being touched around the face and muzzle.

Secondly, examining teeth in a conscious patient, and cleaning the visible surface above the gum line, will not detect any of the dental disease present below the gum line, and thus provides no health or medical benefit to the pet. It is purely cosmetic, making the teeth look superficially “clean”, but serving no other purpose.

Unfortunately animals may still have significant dental disease and remain in pain in the long-term after one of these superficial “anaesthesia-free” cleans. It lulls owners into a false sense of security, and they may not be aware that their pet is still suffering with dental disease.

Dental disease occurs above and below the gum line. To properly examine, diagnose and treat dental disease in pets, it must be done by a veterinarian while the animal is anaesthetised. A general anaesthetic ensures the veterinarian can complete a thorough inspection of every single tooth above and below the gum line, probe the pockets surrounding the tooth and check for underlying pathology that can’t be detected by just a visual examination of the exposed part of the teeth.

The anaesthetic ensures the experience is a positive one for your pet, because it is unaware of the pain during the procedure, and does not need to be physically restrained.

Dental disease is common in Australian pets. If left untreated, it can be painful and lead to chronic health concerns. Pet owners are encouraged to speak to their veterinarian about the importance of good oral health and regular dental check-ups for their pets.