Dear Delegate:

You may be unaware of 2 research studies comparing non-anesthetic dental scaling with scaling performed under anesthesia. One is currently under way but the first one, performed at the University of Pennsylvania, showed that, when done properly using the proper candidates, the two procedures were equivalent, just as they are in human dentistry.

All pets’ mouths should be examined by veterinarians. All dental procedures should be done under the supervision of a veterinarian. But to require anesthesia for all dental scaling as part of AVMA policy on veterinary dentistry is micromanaging the individual veterinarian. Veterinarians are trained to use their best judgment in the practice of veterinary medicine, and this is one case where the judgment of the veterinarian comes into play. If a veterinarian or their veterinary technician or dental technician is able to properly perform this procedure without anesthesia, they should not be discouraged from doing so. If they are unable to properly control a patient, then they should certainly use anesthesia. But the decision should be up to the veterinarian, not dictated by policy which will be viewed by state veterinary boards as The Standard of Practice.

If veterinarians can’t perform dental scaling without anesthetic for fear of repercussion, the procedure will go underground, with unqualified lay people filling the gap. We have already seen some of the problems associated when that happens: broken jaws, missed dental abcesses, and the public perception of these people as heroes and veterinarians as the bad guys.

Veterinarians know the science behind dental procedures. Let them practice the art of medicine, using their judgment without undue restrictions.

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