

Dog owners fearful to reveal pet problems

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Veterinary scientists say many dog owners relinquishing pets to animal shelters aren't honest about their pets' behavioral problems.

Veterinarians from the University of Pennsylvania and the University of California say the unwillingness to detail such problems probably stems from a fear the pets will be put to sleep.

But to researchers, revealing such problems is important to avoid placing an adopting family at risk from an aggressive animal.

The researchers studied questionnaires given to owners leaving their dogs at shelters and found people are less likely to report behavioral problems such as aggression or fear of strangers if they believe their responses will be shared with shelter staff.

"Many shelters conduct behavior-based evaluations on animals they take in, but there are few better descriptions of a dog's temperament than an honest assessment from its owner through a questionnaire," said James Serpell, a Penn professor and director of the school's Center for the Interaction of Animals and Society. "Shelters are not in the business of giving up on the animals they receive, and they need the best information the owner can provide ..."

The study appeared recently in the Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association.

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