

Unique study reveals dog owners' motivations for pet blood donation

February 13 2017



Credit: University of Nottingham

A new study by researchers at the University of Nottingham's Vet School has revealed fascinating insights into the motivations of pet owners who volunteer their dog as a blood donor.

Human [blood donation](#) saves millions of lives a year worldwide and for the past decade canine [blood](#) banks have also been operating in the UK. These blood banks collect process and store canine blood and are increasingly being used by veterinary surgeons as animal healthcare advances and demand for animal blood products to use in veterinary transfusion grows.

The research draws on findings from interviews with [pet owners](#) to explore their reasoning and motivations for offering their pet as an animal blood donor. It found that owners often refer to their personal experiences or assumptions about human blood donation when

explaining their decision.

The research also extends understanding of the human-animal bond and the sociology of donation by revealing how a dog's status as a family member or 'kin' meant they were expected to donate blood, and that the act of donation itself is an important opportunity to 'display' interspecies family bonds.

Importantly, the study shows that veterinary decision-making can be relevant to human healthcare decisions, and that further examination of comparative areas of animal health could benefit both healthcare sectors.

Lead author of the study, Dr Vanessa Ashall MRCVS, Wellcome Trust Clinical Research Fellow at Nottingham Vet School, said: "The findings of this study are fascinating in highlighting how the position of pets in some families leads to a blurring of boundaries between blood donation decision making for humans and animals. The implications are very significant with some pet owners suggesting that their animal donating blood alleviates the guilt they feel about not donating blood themselves. This work highlights how a conflict of interest could arise between animals and their owners in the blood donation clinic."

Assistant Professor in Welfare, Ethics and Society, Dr Pru Hobson-West, said: "This novel research opens up the fascinating possibility that people's experiences at the vets influences their healthcare decisions at the doctors, and vice-versa. This represents a whole new area for medical sociologists and others to study."

The UK National Blood service says 25% of people will need a blood transfusion at some point but only 4% of adults in the UK are blood donors and there is a growing shortage as eligible donors retire from donating. The researchers believe key messages learned from the pet

owners in this study could be useful in helping to develop our understanding of blood donation and wider human healthcare decisions.

More information: Vanessa Ashall et al. 'Doing good by proxy': Human-animal kinship and the 'donation' of canine blood, *Sociology of Health & Illness* (2017). [DOI: 10.1111/1467-9566.12534](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9566.12534)

Provided by University of Nottingham

Citation: Unique study reveals dog owners' motivations for pet blood donation (2017, February 13) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-02-unique-reveals-dog-owners-pet.html>

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