

PINK OCTOBER PET EXTENSION PROJECT: THE IMPORTANCE OF RAISING AWARENESS AMONG PET OWNERS AND STUDENTS ABOUT BREAST CANCER IN VETERINARY MEDICINE

PROJETO DE EXTENSÃO OUTUBRO ROSA PET: IMPORTÂNCIA DA CONSCIENTIZAÇÃO DE TUTORES E DISCENTES SOBRE O CÂNCER DE MAMA NA MEDICINA VETERINÁRIA

PROYECTO DE EXTENSIÓN DE MASCOTAS OCTUBRE ROSA: LA IMPORTANCIA DE CONCIENTIZAR A DUEÑOS DE MASCOTAS Y ESTUDIANTES SOBRE EL CÁNCER DE MAMA EN MEDICINA VETERINARIA



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ABSTRACT

Mammary neoplasms are among the main oncological conditions in small animal practice, presenting high prevalence in female dogs and highly malignant behavior in female cats, and are frequently diagnosed at advanced stages. This scenario is associated, among other factors, with owners' lack of information regarding the use of progestogens, early clinical signs, and preventive measures, such as early spaying. Therefore, the present study aimed to describe and analyze the importance of a university extension project, developed within the context of the "Pink October Pet" campaign, in raising awareness among dog and cat owners and in the technical-scientific training of Veterinary Medicine students regarding mammary cancer in female dogs and cats. This is an experience report of a descriptive and qualitative nature, carried out through in-person educational activities, a digital social media campaign, and a scientific event, involving owners, students, and professionals in the field. The results demonstrated a wide reach of the extension activities, both in person and on digital platforms, in addition to high participant engagement. An improvement in owners' knowledge regarding prevention and early diagnosis was observed, as well as a significant contribution to the practical, scientific, and humanized training of the students involved. It is

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concluded that university extension projects constitute effective tools for animal health education, promoting community awareness and reinforcing the social role of the university in the prevention of mammary neoplasms in small animals.

Keywords: Extension Work. Neoplasia. Oncology. Animal Health.

RESUMO

As neoplasias mamárias figuram entre as principais afecções oncológicas na clínica de pequenos animais, apresentando elevada prevalência em cadelas e comportamento altamente maligno em gatas, sendo frequentemente diagnosticadas em estágios avançados. Esse cenário está associado, entre outros fatores, à desinformação dos tutores quanto ao uso de progestágenos, aos sinais clínicos iniciais e às medidas preventivas, como a castração precoce. Diante disso, o presente estudo teve como objetivo descrever e analisar a importância de um projeto de extensão universitária, desenvolvido no contexto da campanha Outubro Rosa Pet, na conscientização de tutores de cães e gatos e na formação técnico-científica de discentes de Medicina Veterinária acerca do câncer de mama em cadelas e gatas. Trata-se de um relato de experiência, de natureza descritiva e qualitativa, realizado por meio de ações educativas presenciais, campanha digital em rede social e evento científico, envolvendo tutores, discentes e profissionais da área. Os resultados demonstraram amplo alcance das atividades extensionistas, tanto presencialmente quanto nas plataformas digitais, além de elevado engajamento dos participantes. Observou-se fortalecimento do conhecimento dos tutores sobre prevenção e diagnóstico precoce, bem como contribuição significativa para a capacitação prática, científica e humanizada dos discentes envolvidos. Conclui-se que projetos de extensão universitária configuram ferramentas eficazes de educação em saúde animal, promovendo conscientização da comunidade e reforçando o papel social da universidade na prevenção das neoplasias mamárias em pequenos animais.

Palavras-chave: Extencionismo. Neoplasia. Oncologia. Saúde Animal.

RESUMEN

Las neoplasias mamarias se encuentran entre las principales afecciones oncológicas en la clínica de pequeños animales, presentando alta prevalencia en perras y un comportamiento altamente maligno en gatas, siendo frecuentemente diagnosticadas en estadios avanzados. Este escenario está asociado, entre otros factores, a la falta de información de los tutores sobre el uso de progestágenos, los signos clínicos iniciales y las medidas preventivas, como la esterilización precoz. Ante esto, el presente estudio tuvo como objetivo describir y analizar la importancia de un proyecto de extensión universitaria, desarrollado en el contexto de la campaña "Octubre Rosa Pet", en la concienciación de tutores de perros y gatos y en la formación técnico-científica de estudiantes de Medicina Veterinaria acerca del cáncer de mama en perras y gatas. Se trata de un relato de experiencia, de carácter descriptivo y cualitativo, realizado mediante acciones educativas presenciales, campaña digital en redes sociales y un evento científico, involucrando tutores, estudiantes y profesionales del área. Los resultados demostraron un amplio alcance de las actividades extensionistas, tanto de manera presencial como en plataformas digitales, además de un alto nivel de participación. Se observó un fortalecimiento del conocimiento de los tutores sobre la prevención y el diagnóstico precoz, así como una contribución significativa a la capacitación práctica, científica y humanizada de los estudiantes involucrados. Se concluye que los proyectos de extensión universitaria constituyen herramientas eficaces de educación en salud animal, promoviendo la concienciación de la comunidad y reforzando el papel social de la universidad en la prevención de las neoplasias mamarias en pequeños animales.

Palabras clave: Trabajo de Extensión. Neoplasia. Oncología. Salud Animal.

1 INTRODUCTION

Mammary neoplasms represent one of the main oncological diseases in small animal clinics, especially in female dogs and felines, and are an important cause of morbidity and mortality in these species. In female dogs, these tumors correspond to approximately half of all diagnosed neoplasms, and about 50% are malignant in nature. In felines, despite their lower relative frequency, approximately 80% of mammary neoplasms are malignant, with rapid growth and early metastases, representing an important clinical and therapeutic challenge (Nelson; Couto, 2015; Cassali et al., 2020).

The reproductive condition of the female and the time at which the ovariohysterectomy is performed are determining factors in prevention. When castration is performed before the first heat, the risk of developing breast tumors approaches minimum levels, increasing progressively when castration occurs after the first and second estrus (Fonseca; Daleck, 2000; Piekarz et al., 2008). In cats, castration before six months of age can reduce the incidence of mammary neoplasms by up to 91%, and when performed before one year, this reduction is approximately 86% (Memon et al., 2016).

Another widely described risk factor includes the use of progestin- and estrogen-based contraceptives, a condition that favors cell proliferation of the mammary gland, increasing the predisposition to tumor development. However, the low cost and easy access to these agents make their use indiscriminate (Fonseca; Daleck, 2000; Skorupski et al., 2005).

Despite its clinical and epidemiological relevance, the diagnosis still occurs, in most cases, late, compromising the prognosis and therapeutic possibilities. Among the factors that contribute to this delay, the limitation of knowledge on the part of owners in identifying the clinical signs and the initial physical changes of the condition stands out, delaying the search for specialized veterinary care.

In view of this scenario, the need for strategies that expand access to information and favor the adoption of preventive and early detection measures is evident. In this context, educational actions aimed at animal health are fundamental, especially when developed in a continuous and accessible way to the population. University extension is a relevant instrument in this process by allowing the approximation between the scientific knowledge produced in the academy and the reality experienced by the community, while contributing to the practical, ethical and humanized training of Veterinary Medicine students (Rodrigues et al., 2013).

In view of the above, the present study aimed to describe and analyze the importance of a university extension project, developed in the context of Pink October Pet, in the awareness of dog and cat owners and in the technical-scientific training of Veterinary

Medicine students about breast cancer in dogs and cats.

2 METHODOLOGY

The present study is characterized as an experience report, of a descriptive and qualitative nature, with an educational and extension approach, developed within the scope of a university extension project of the Veterinary Medicine course at the Maurício de Nassau University, Graças Unit, in the city of Recife-PE. The actions were carried out in the context of the Pink Pet October campaign, from August 2025 to January 2026, involving face-to-face and digital activities aimed at raising awareness about breast neoplasms in dogs and cats.

The target audience was composed of dog and cat owners from the local community, attended at the School of Veterinary Medicine Clinic of UNINASSAU and in adjacent public spaces, as well as Veterinary Medicine students, direct participants in the extension activities. Students and professionals in the area who participated in the scientific actions promoted by the project, such as a symposium and podcast episode, were also included. Thus, the contemplated public was characterized as heterogeneous, including participants with different levels of previous knowledge about the investigated theme.

The activities developed in the project were organized in a sequential and integrated way, covering three main axes: face-to-face educational actions, a digital campaign through the social network Instagram and a scientific event aimed at students of the veterinary medicine course and professionals in the area.

The face-to-face educational actions took place during the Breast Cancer Awareness Week in Dogs and Kittens, held at the Veterinary Medicine School Clinic of UNINASSAU. At this stage, individualized verbal guidance was given to the tutors, using accessible language, addressing risk factors, initial clinical signs, the importance of breast palpation, periodic veterinary follow-up and castration as a preventive measure. At the same time, educational pamphlets prepared by the project team were distributed.

The educational digital campaign was developed through the Instagram platform, with the publication of informative content on breast neoplasms, prevention, early diagnosis and risks of using hormonal contraceptives. Additionally, a podcast episode was produced and disseminated, recorded in an institutional studio, with the participation of a specialist in veterinary oncology, aiming to expand the reach of information in a way that is accessible to the general public.

The scientific event, characterized by the Symposium on Mammary Neoplasms in Dogs and Cats, was held in a face-to-face format, with lectures and a round table given by invited veterinarians, addressing clinical, surgical and anatomopathological aspects of breast

neoplasms. The event aimed to promote scientific updating and integration between students, professors and professionals in the area.

Data collection took place in an observational and documentary way, based on the registration of the activities carried out, the number of face-to-face consultations and guidance, the distribution of educational materials and the indicators of reach of digital publications, obtained through the Instagram Insights tool. Data regarding participation in the symposium were also considered, including the number of registrants and effective attendance.

The data obtained were analyzed in a descriptive way, through the systematization of quantitative information and the qualitative analysis of the impact of the extension actions, considering the involvement of the participants, the scope of the activities and the contribution of the project to the academic training of the students involved.

The study was conducted respecting ethical principles and with faculty supervision during all extension activities. The methodology adopted made it possible to systematize the actions developed and analyze their scope and contribution to the awareness of the community and the academic training of students. .

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to Lima et al. (2020), university extension consists, in its essence, of the articulation between the higher education institution and the community, integrating teaching and research into the training process and promoting the exchange of knowledge, configuring itself as one of the pillars of higher education. In line with this perspective, the activities developed in this extension project favored the approximation between university and community, reinforcing the role of extension as an instrument for the dissemination of knowledge and promotion of animal health in the context of Veterinary Medicine.

The execution of the extension project made it possible to carry out educational, clinical and scientific actions aimed at raising awareness about mammary neoplasms in dogs and cats, reaching both the community and academic audiences. The face-to-face activities allowed the clarification of doubts about the main risk factors, initial clinical signs and prevention strategies, with an emphasis on early castration and periodic veterinary follow-up. In addition, the actions contributed to the early identification of mammary neoplasia in 15 of the 25 dogs evaluated that accompanied their owners during the activities, a fundamental aspect, since the literature consistently demonstrates that the earlier the neoplasm is identified, the greater the chances of successful treatment and better prognosis for the patient (Daleck; De Nardi, 2016; Cassali, 2020).

In the digital environment, the educational campaign developed through the social network Instagram had a significant reach, with approximately 81,000 views on the published content, mostly from non-followers, while the podcast episode obtained approximately 2,100 views. This result corroborates the literature by highlighting the potential of social media as strategic tools for the dissemination of information on animal health, expanding access to scientific knowledge beyond the physical limits of the university. These findings are in line with what is described by França et al. (2019), who highlight the role of digital media in expanding the reach of educational and scientific actions.

The Symposium on Mammary Neoplasms in Dogs and Cats was configured as a prominent action in the scientific axis of the project, promoting technical-scientific updating and integration between students, teachers and professionals in the area. The initiative highlighted the importance of spaces for scientific discussion focused on veterinary oncology, an area of high relevance in the small animal clinic. For the students involved in the organization and execution of the event, the experience contributed to the development of skills in scientific communication, teamwork and management of academic activities.

From the point of view of student training, the project enabled the practical application of theoretical knowledge, especially with regard to breast oncology, communication with tutors and ethical and humanized performance. The extension experience allowed students to understand the importance of the social role of the veterinarian and the opportunity to apply, in practice, the knowledge acquired in the classroom, favoring academic development beyond the theoretical environment. These findings corroborate the literature that highlights university extension as a fundamental axis in professional training, as it integrates teaching, research and social responsibility (Rodrigues et al., 2013).

4 CONCLUSION

The extension project developed in the context of Pink October Pet had a relevant impact on the awareness of dog and cat owners and on the technical-scientific training of Veterinary Medicine students on breast neoplasms. The educational, clinical and scientific actions favored the dissemination of information on prevention, risk factors and early diagnosis, in addition to bringing academic knowledge closer to the community. The initiative also favored the development of technical, ethical and communication skills of students, evidencing the high social and educational potential of extension actions.

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