

## Proposal of a customized animal welfare protocol for military kennels

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### Summary

The guarantee of animal welfare has been modernly approached in both physical and emotional aspects. The objective of this work was to propose a management protocol that maximizes animal welfare for working dogs, and that takes into account the particularities of Brazilian military institutions, so being able to be implemented more easily. A literature search was conducted and a task force was created to inform the project. After the review, meetings and discussions, the writing of the protocol was finalized. It is divided into eight theoretical and practical prompts, sometimes exemplified. The proposed protocol covers the theoretical proposals on animal welfare found in the literature, in addition to respecting the characteristics and peculiarities of the institutions and military routines in question, which would theoretically facilitate their implementation. After consolidating this proposal, new studies are needed to validate the protocol through its implementation.

**Keywords:** working dogs' welfare, animal welfare, military working dogs

## Introduction

The guarantee of animal welfare has been modernly approached in both physical and emotional aspects (Rooney et al., 2009). Working dogs, despite having similar needs as other types of dogs, have particularities in their selection, environment and routine that should be considered (Rooney et al., 2005). Additionally, animal welfare is decisively influenced by beliefs and values, varying according to the local culture, the nature and the importance that animals assume in different communities (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2009). Working dogs, and particularly those of military employment, are considered valuable tools by the institutions that employ them (Brazilian Army, 2013) and companions of the military personnel who have them in their daily lives (Lefebvre et al., 2007). Within this context, the objective of this work was to propose a management protocol that maximizes animal welfare for working dogs, and that considers the particularities of Brazilian military institutions, so being able to be implemented more easily.

## Material and Methods

A search was made in the national and world literature relating to working animals' welfare for the theoretical basis of the proposal. A task force, composed of heads of military kennels, trainers and veterinarians, involved in the routine of the kennels' dogs of the Brazilian Army in the state of São Paulo, was assigned to the task. The group held three face-to-face meetings and virtual discussions to develop the protocol.

## Results

After the review, meetings and discussions, the writing of the protocol was finalized. It is divided into eight theoretical and practical points, sometimes exemplified: 1. Ensure good quality nutrition and hydration, compatible with the specific individual requirements of the animals, following veterinarian's advice; 2. Ensure preventive and healing medical care, with planned follow-up and previously available veterinary medical assistance compatible with the activity performed; 3. Provide bio-climatological adequate daily environments and redouble care when the animals are in other environments, for instance, the supply of transport vehicles for dogs; 4. Provide appropriate leading and training equipment that ensure the physical and emotional integrity of the animals, such as the reduced use of choke chain collars and the nonuse of electronic collars without the

assistance of a behavioral veterinarian and/or consultant; 5. To reduce as much as possible the aversive stimulations, especially those of chronic character, by optimizing the use of the critical period of socialization of the puppies, the use of training practices that respect the Least Invasive Minimally Aversive (LIMA) protocol and the use of fear free practices in veterinary medicine; 6. Promote routines of physical and cognitive activities that promote motivation and relief of mental and physical stress, such as guided physical training routines and practices of cognitive and food environmental enrichment; 7. Promote the technical training of handlers with the concepts of ethology, cognition and animal welfare, through the insertion of hours of this knowledge in the various training courses and continuing education programs offered in the institutions; 8. Keep records of the abovementioned behaviors and objective parameters of well-being previously listed, such as periodic stress tests on a sample of animals or individualized monitoring of the animals by a behavioral veterinarian.

## Discussion

Although today there are several currents that categorize the thought proposals on animal welfare, two deserve to be emphasized: the bio-physiological and the mental/emotional. Broadly speaking, such proposals refer to the physical aspects of welfare - reflected in the organic development and maintenance of good animal health - and the mental aspects of welfare - reflected in the sensation of mental satisfaction and the absence of chronic stress disease - as being essential (Duncan, 2005). Within these proposals, points 1 to 3 aim to ensure the physical aspects of welfare and points 4 to 7 seek to work with the mental and emotional animal aspects.

According to Broom and Johnson (1993) there are some aspects that can be taken as parameters for measuring welfare levels such as: expression of a wide range of behaviors considered as normal for the species, conditions and characteristics of presentation of preferred behaviors, and analysis of the physiological indicators of pleasure. At that matter, point 8, the one that concerns welfare measures and registration, aims at the production of information that will allow planning, re-evaluation and possible redirection of actions, besides being an objective measurement of the effectiveness of the protocol itself. In this way, each institution or military unit must determine the most appropriate indicators for monitoring the implementation of the protocol.

The maintenance of management and training techniques considered as traditional, based on principles that have sometimes been overcome, and without proper evaluation of the

negative implications of non-management of aversive stimuli, may represent, through increased stress levels, a possible risk to emotional health (Lieberman, 1999). In this way, there was an intense concern on the part of the working group, demonstrated in prompts 5, 6 and 7, to advocate modern training and behavior modification techniques (International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants, 2018) and avoid techniques that may compromise animal welfare and cause behavioral problems, such as choke chain and electronic collars (Coopers & Mills, 2014). These items become of paramount importance for the military routine, since dogs with low welfare levels may lose explosive detection work performance (Rooney et al., 2005).

The proposed protocol covers the theoretical proposals on animal welfare found in the literature, in addition to respecting the characteristics and peculiarities of the institutions and military routines in question, which would theoretically facilitate their implementation. After consolidating this proposal, future research is needed to validate the protocol through its implementation

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