

Removal of the dewclaws of dogs

SIR, – I read Caroline Kisco's letter (*VR*, May 31, 2008, vol 162, p731) with some bewilderment and, I must admit, a tinge of annoyance. The Kennel Club glossary definition of dewclaws describes them thus: 'fifth digit on the inside of the pastern. Most breeds do not have rear dewclaws but some breeds require double rear dewclaws (eg, briard, Pyrenean mountain dog) and the Italian spinone has single rear dewclaws.' That is, according to the breed standards laid down by the Kennel Club there are clearly some breeds for which dewclaws are a prerequisite. Presumably, any vet removing the double claws of, for example, a briard would then come under criticism should that dog end up being excluded from or marked down in the showing.

The danger with comments such as those in Ms Kisco's letter are that vets, particularly the more junior members of the profession, may feel under pressure to perform procedures they feel uncomfortable with purely because a client says the law allows it. I would prefer, as a veterinary surgeon, to follow the ethical guidance of my profession when it comes to procedures I should or shouldn't perform rather than have them dictated to me by a body concerned mainly with the appearance of dogs rather than the impact that may have on their health and welfare. As such, I think I will continue to exercise my right not to perform any unnecessary mutilations whether the law allows it or not, and I would urge the rest of the profession to do the same.

Emma Goodman Milne, *Minster Veterinary Practice, Salisbury Road, York YO26 4YN*



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