

## **Rabies Post Exposure Treatment: Cost Reduction through Responsible Pet Ownership**

**W.A.D.C.H.Wickramasinghe<sup>1</sup>, Amila Gunsekera<sup>2</sup>, Omala Wimalaratne<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Postgraduate Institute of Science, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya, Sri Lanka.  
Rabies Treatment Unit, National Hospital, Colombo, Sri Lanka.

<sup>3</sup>Department of Rabies and Vaccines, Medical Research Institute, Colombo 8, Sri Lanka.  
(e-mail: [chandika17@yahoo.com](mailto:chandika17@yahoo.com))

---

### **ABSTRACT**

Dog bites is the primary mode of transmission of rabies to humans. Given the financial burden to the government, the annual death toll from rabies, physical and mental trauma of bite victims and their families etc., rabies can be considered as a disaster. Although the human death toll is on the decrease, the number of bite victims and therefore the cost of human post exposure treatment are escalating, despite the different strategies which have been adopted in Sri Lanka to curb this national menace. This study was carried out to ascertain the possibility of reducing public spending through responsible pet ownership (RPO). RPO encompasses regular vaccination and sterilization of pets and maintenance of their proper records and prevention of pets from roaming in public etc.

Data were collected through a questionnaire from randomly selected 213 patients at the rabies treatment unit of the National Hospital. One stunning finding was that only 36.6% of the patients (n=213) knew that rabies was a 100% fatal disease. Also, of the dog/cat owners (n=102), only 12.7% had their pets sterilized, while as much as 45.1% of owners allowed their pets to roam. Moreover, vaccination cover against rabies was not up to the accepted standards. These figures clearly depict the unsatisfactory RPO situation in Sri Lanka. Further, the percentage of bites caused by house-hold pets, stray or community owned dogs/cats and wild animals were 46.5%, 31.9% and 21.6% respectively. Expense-wise these figures stood at 32.3%, 54.7% and 13% respectively. 32.3% cost caused by house-hold pets is the primary emphasis in this study for it could have been prevented or substantially minimized through RPO. Moreover, 54.7% cost caused by stray or community owned dogs/ cats too can be minimized, because these same owners are responsible for generating such stray/community owned populations by dumping excess puppies of their bitches in roads, schools, temples etc.

Unsatisfactory RPO situation together with high percentage of costs due to pet dogs and cats confirm the high potential of cost reduction on human rabies post exposure treatment by creating awareness on responsible pet ownership among Sri Lankan pet owners.

---