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**RABIES POST EXPOSURE TREATMENT:
COST REDUCTION THROUGH RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERSHIP**

A PROJECT REPORT PRESENTED BY

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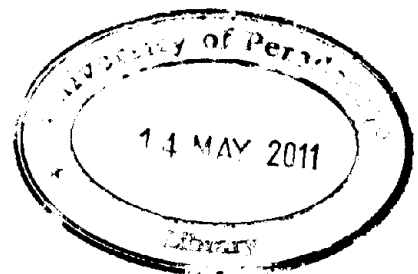
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RABIES POST EXPOSURE TREATMENT: COST REDUCTION THROUGH RESPONSIBLE PET OWNERSHIP

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Human rabies, of which the primary mode of transmission is dog bites, can be considered a disaster in terms of the financial burden, annual death toll, physical and mental trauma of bite victims and their families etc. Despite different strategies which have been adopted to curb this national menace - although the number of human deaths due to rabies is on the decrease - Sri Lanka experiences an escalating number of bite victims together with high cost for human post exposure treatment. This study, therefore, was carried out mainly to ascertain the possibility of such cost reduction through *responsible pet ownership [RPO]*. RPO encompasses regular vaccination of pets and maintenance of proper records, preventing pets from roaming, sterilizing them 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 owned dogs and cats confirm the high potential of cost reduction for human rabies post exposure treatment by creating awareness on responsible pet ownership among Sri Lankan pet owners.