



June 11, 2009

The executive board of the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB) is deeply troubled to learn that Merial, a leader in the veterinary healthcare industry, is using Cesar Millan in a promotional campaign for Heartgard and Frontline. We are even more disturbed to find that Merial is cross-promoting Mr. Millan's behavior video as part of this campaign. Merial's executives may not be aware of the fact that the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists (ACVB; www.dacvb.org), the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB; www.avsabonline.org) and the Society of Veterinary Behavior Technicians (SVBT; www.svbt.org) have uniformly spoken out against the coercive, "dominance"-based techniques employed by Mr. Millan on his television show "The Dog Whisperer."

At best, the show is entertaining but misleading to pet owners. At worst, Mr. Millan's techniques and misinformation have contributed to increased aggression and anxiety or resulted in physical injury to the pet and/or pet owner. As practicing veterinarians, we all unfortunately have seen many cases of the latter. Merial claims to "enhance the health, well-being, and performance of animals." Asking veterinarians to recommend that their clients seek behavior information from Mr. Millan speaks otherwise. In these difficult economic times, it may be understandable that Merial would want to use a celebrity to advertise its products in a direct-to-consumer fashion. However, had Merial taken the time to investigate, it would have found that Mr. Millan's philosophy runs counter to the standard-of-care promoted by veterinary behaviorists and taught at veterinary schools.

For reference, we have attached AVSAB's position statements on the "Use of Punishment in Behavior Modification in Animals" and "Dominance Theory in Behavior Modification in Animals". You will find that these statements are based in scientific research and do not support the techniques Mr. Millan promotes on his show. We would also be happy to provide you with additional peer-reviewed references indicating that the training methods televised on "The Dog Whisperer" often lead to increased aggression and human injury.

We are deeply saddened that Merial's executives are not more supportive of the veterinary behavior community and its efforts to promote effective, scientifically-based, humane training methods. We remain concerned that your company's support of Mr. Millan's controversial training methods through the distribution of his video and financial support of his show will contribute to the number of difficult dogs and injured owners that we have to eventually console, counsel, and reeducate. Perhaps Merial would like to support our efforts to counteract the negative impact of this unfortunate marketing choice that may ultimately serve to alienate educated veterinarians, dog trainers, and owners alike. We would welcome the opportunity to further discuss this issue with Merial.

Sincerely,

E. Kathryn Meyer, VMD (President)
John Ciribassi, DVM, DACVB (Immediate Past President)
Karen Sueda, DVM, DACVB (President Elect)
Kari Krause, DVM
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June 15, 2009

The American College of Veterinary Behaviorists (ACVB) promotes the welfare of animals and the human-animal bond using positive, evidence-based methods. ACVB Diplomates are disappointed that the veterinary pharmaceutical firm Merial has recently entered into a marketing agreement with a specific dog trainer and TV personality to promote their products Heartgard and Frontline, as well as this individual's products.

This association is extremely disturbing since it implies an endorsement by Merial of this trainer's methods. This charismatic individual employs techniques which are not scientifically sound, and utilizes fear and intimidation to manage behavior. Studies in peer-reviewed publications,^{a,b} and the clinical experience of ACVB Diplomates confirm that such techniques can actually worsen existing behavior problems, including aggression, and erode the human animal bond.

Merial's support of the veterinary profession over the years has been very much appreciated. However, employing a dog trainer who utilizes scientifically incorrect techniques to promote veterinarian-prescribed products is inappropriate. Further, veterinarians have an implied liability when they refer clients to others for services, and the promotion of these methods to our veterinary colleagues and their clients as the way to prevent or manage behavior problems is misleading.

Merial's association with this trainer and his methods do a disservice to our profession, our clients, and our patients. ACVB strongly opposes this action by Merial.

^aHerron ME, Shofer FS, Reisner IR. Survey of the use and outcome of confrontational and non-confrontational training methods in client-owned dogs showing undesired behaviors *Applied Animal Behaviour Science* 2009;117:47-54. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.applanim.2008.12.011>

^bBlackwell EJ, Twells C, Seawright A, Casey RA. The relationship between training methods and the occurrence of behavior problems, as reported by owners, in a population of domestic dogs *Journal of Veterinary Behavior: Clinical Application and Research* 2008;3:207-217. [http://www.journalvetbehavior.com/article/S1558-7878\(07\)00276-6/abstract](http://www.journalvetbehavior.com/article/S1558-7878(07)00276-6/abstract)



June 16, 2009

Fellow Veterinary Professionals,

The Society of Veterinary Behavior Technicians (SVBT) would like to bring an important matter to your attention. Merial has recently started an ad campaign for Frontline and Heartgard featuring a prominent television personality. The promotion includes distribution of videos with training demonstrations, and displays featuring the celebrity's image with the product. We feel the techniques demonstrated in these videos and by this celebrity's television show can be harmful to the health and safety of clients and patients. We share a deep concern that veterinarians participating in this Merial promotion will be seen as endorsing these techniques.

As veterinary professionals, we all treasure the human-animal bond and work to nurture it every day. SVBT, the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists (ACVB), the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB) and the Academy of Veterinary Behavior Technicians (AVBT) are encouraging clinics not to take part in this Merial promotion, and in particular not to distribute these training materials. We would like to take this opportunity to direct you and your clients toward training and handling materials based on positive, scientifically sound methods based on using learning theory rather than fear and intimidation.

Enclosed you will find the official position statements from SVBT, AVBT, ACVB and AVSAB regarding this promotion. AVSAB also has a wonderful handout for veterinarians and pet owners on the use of force and dominance based training available through their website <http://www.avsabonline.org>.

A few of the many videos recommended by SVBT:

Training the Companion Dog by Dr. Ian Dunbar

Perfect Paws in 5 Days by Jean Donaldson

A few of the many books recommended by SVBT:

Dr. Dunbar's Good Little Dog Book by Dr. Ian Dunbar

How to Teach a New Dog Old Tricks by Dr. Ian Dunbar

The Culture Clash by Jean Donaldson

And a new title for the veterinary professional:

Low Stress Handling, Restraint and Behavior Modification of the Dog and Cat by Dr. Sophia Yin

For a complete reading list or to contact us at any time, please visit our website at <http://www.svbt.org>.

Sincerely,

Monique Feyrecilde, LVT

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Incoming President, SVBT

And the SVBT Board of Directors



Merial Ltd.
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6/10/09

Dr. Scott Line,

On behalf of the Society of Veterinary Behavior Technicians (SVBT) and the Academy of Veterinary Behavior Technicians (AVBT) we are writing to express our concerns about the use of current popular TV dog trainer in your current advertising campaign. While we acknowledge that this is a well known and easily recognizable celebrity we are concerned that this causes conflict of ethics for many veterinary team members.

The conflict arises in that veterinary teams are recommending training techniques based on science which are contrary to those shown on TV. Our members are concerned that they cannot, in good conscience recommend products that are part of your current promotion for the following reasons:

- The information provided in the free download will not support the behavior recommendations of the veterinary team
- The information & trainer promote common myths about the relationships between humans and dogs
- Having visual advertising that includes a TV trainer implies that the veterinary team supports or endorses of the methods used by this trainer

If we had been asked to contribute information about creation of an advertising campaign that includes a pet trainer we would have recommended the following:

- Use of another more current, science based trainer such as Karen Pryor, Jean Donaldson, Ian Dunbar or Victoria Stillwell
- Review of recommendations by the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behaviorists and the American College of Veterinary Behaviorists
- Review of information to ensure it supported the recommendations of the veterinary team
- Providing information to clients about current science based animal training methods

We thank you for your time and consideration of our concerns.

Sincerely,

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Amanda Eick-Miller, RVT, CPDT
President; The Society of Veterinary Behavior Technicians