

Correspondence

Kinetic Treatment Tables

TO THE EDITOR: The article by Demarest and colleagues in the January 1989 issue¹ provides a useful basis for the application of the Kinetic Treatment Table (KTT). We advise caution, however, in the application of KTT for patients who are critically dependent on a mechanical ventilator. Our experience is that the 120 degrees' rotation of the KTT bed produces a constant torquing force on ventilator tubing that can lead to frequent disconnections at the endotracheal tube or tracheostomy connector. We tried a variety of tube fixation methods but were unable to prevent this problem. We have, therefore, excluded quadriplegics and other critically ventilator-dependent patients from KTT, which is unfortunate because they are patients who might benefit from this treatment modality.

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REFERENCE

1. Demarest GB, Schmidt-Nowara WW, Vance LW, et al: Use of the kinetic treatment table to prevent the pulmonary complications of multiple trauma. *West J Med* 1989; 150:35-38

Pet Ferrets—A Hazard to Public Health and Wildlife

TO THE EDITOR: European ferrets—relatives of the polecat—are cute and playful, and they are becoming increasingly popular as pets. Indeed, they have been dubbed the “pop pet” of the 1980s. Their growing popularity, however, is viewed with alarm by numerous public health entities and animal care organizations. Among the organizations opposing the keeping of ferrets as pets are the Humane Society of the United States, the Defenders of Wildlife, the American Veterinary Medical Association, the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists, the US Animal Health Association, the California Department of Health Services, and the federal Centers for Disease Control. Despite the problems attendant to keeping these animals as pets, ferret proponents have been conducting a national campaign in the past two years to popularize these animals and to repeal laws banning the keeping of pet ferrets.

Ferret play frequently assumes the form of mock attacks, which may result in bites to humans. Serious bites may occur, especially if the animal is surprised or angered. Adults are usually able to quickly terminate such encounters and thereby limit injury. Infants, however, who often seem to be perceived by ferrets as prey, may suffer severe injury as a result of such attacks.^{1,2} Ferrets sometimes unleash frenzied, rapid-fire bite and slash attacks on infants, usually on their heads and throats, and sometimes inflict hundreds of bites. The animals have been reported to then drink the victim's blood and eat the shredded tissues.¹⁻⁴

In order to better define the nature and extent of ferret attacks and in response to requests for information from the Department of Fish and Game and the Department of Food

and Agriculture, the California Department of Health Services in early 1986 solicited reports about ferret attacks from neighboring states, federal and local government agencies, and professional organizations. During the subsequent two years, information was obtained on 452 ferret attacks spanning the ten-year period 1978 through 1987.¹ A total of 425 attacks on people were reported from California, Oregon, and Arizona. Of these attacks, 100 were in California, where it has been illegal to keep ferrets as pets since 1935. Also reported from a total of 18 states were 63 unprovoked attacks on infants and small children. Several of these were near-fatal attacks. One additional case, a fatal attack, was reported from London.

Data from California indicate that the majority of attacks were inflicted by pet ferrets belonging to households other than the victim's.

In all, 28% of infants required plastic and reconstructive surgery, 22% of victims required rabies prophylaxis, and 4% were known to have been exposed to rabid ferrets.

Ferrets have a great propensity for escaping from their principal residences, and escaped ferrets are known to boldly approach wildlife. These ferrets may develop rabies after returning home; 12 such cases have been reported in the United States. There is no approved rabies vaccine for ferrets.

Ferrets also develop feral populations and are especially destructive of poultry and small wild animals such as rabbits, which was the reason why the keeping of ferrets as pets was outlawed in California. Data gathered from our survey, however, suggest greater surveillance and enforcement efforts in this regard may be needed.

Physicians should be aware of the problems associated with the keeping of pet ferrets—especially their hazard to infants—and the keeping of these animals as pets should be strongly opposed by medical and public health organizations.

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2. Paisley JW, Lauer BA: Severe facial injuries to infants due to unprovoked attacks by pet ferrets. *JAMA* 1988; 259:2005-2006
3. Fennell JH: A Natural History of British and Foreign Quadrupeds; Containing Many Modern Discoveries, Original Observations, and Numerous Anecdotes. London, Thomas Publishers, 1841
4. Jesse E: Gleanings in Natural History, Second Series. London, John Murray Publishers, 1834

Corrections

TO THE EDITOR: I have an attribution problem in the article, “Chemical Dependency in Women,” by Kathleen Bell Unger, MD, in the December 1988 issue.¹ It occurs on page 749 in Figure 3, which she attributes to Talbott, her reference 14.

The proper attribution is to the article by Melvin L. Selzer: Selzer, ML: The Michigan alcoholism screening test: The quest for a new diagnostic instrument. *Am J Psychi-*