



HALE VETERINARY CLINIC

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Regarding Anesthesia-Free Tooth Grooming in Ontario, Canada

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For many years, there have been people offering a procedure I will refer to as Anesthesia-Free Tooth Grooming (AFTG). In short, they offer to clean a pet's teeth without any chemical restraint. In some places, these businesses have been banned outright, in others they are left alone to carry on business with impunity. The current situation in Ontario is a tad confusing and I have been getting messages from concerned colleagues so feel it is time for me to make a statement.

Let me be clear that I have no jurisdiction over these businesses. I am a veterinary dental specialist with over 26 years of doing nothing but dental and oral surgery on dogs and cats. All veterinarians in Ontario practice under the Veterinarians Act, at the pleasure of the College of Veterinarians of Ontario and must uphold the Act and the Standards of the College or face disciplinary action. The College may also investigate and prosecute members of the public carrying on activities that could be deemed "practicing veterinary medicine without a license", which would be a provincial offense.

In 2014, the College successfully prosecuted a case in the Superior Court of Justice of Ontario against Jill Thompson carrying on business as Pup Star. They were [ordered to cease](#) offering AFTG services and to cease holding themselves out as engaging in the practice of veterinary medicine. They failed to comply and so the College successfully brought [contempt proceedings](#) before the same court in January 2015.

After those two rulings, it seemed that this matter was well and truly put to bed. But the law is a living thing and needs to constantly be scrutinized and challenged in a just society. So, in 2016, the College brought a case against Brigit Johnston carrying on business as Cutting Edge K9 Oral Hygiene before the Superior Court of Justice of Ontario (court file number 56664/16).

I have read through the court file several times and have provided [a copy with many editorial comments](#). The ruling states that it is not technically illegal for a lay-person to scale and polish the crowns of dog teeth without the use of chemical restraint (which is pretty useless since [periodontal disease is hidden](#) below the gum line, not on the crowns). The logic goes that since this is not a procedure offered by veterinarians, it is not "practicing veterinary medicine without a license". Why do veterinarians not offer this procedure? Because it is below the standard of care to which veterinarians in Ontario are held – i.e., it would be mal-practice for a veterinarian to do this or to allow it to be done within their facility.

While that might seem a victory for the AFTG folks, Ms. Johnston was ordered to make a great many changes to the way in which she conducts and promotes her business. By the time she and others like her comply with the [court ruling](#), it will be clear that the procedure they offer is not only of no benefit to the patient but also potentially hazardous. There can be no medical, logical or economic rationale for availing yourself of these procedures.

Sincerely,

P. S. The issue of AFTG would be important enough if periodontal disease was the only oral health concern in dogs but such is not the case. There are many other dental diseases that require general anesthesia for a detailed examination and appropriate treatment such as [endodontic disease](#), [cysts](#) and [deformed teeth, tooth resorption](#) and [much more](#).

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