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#FYI

Who cares for Dhaka's voiceless?

THE STRUGGLE FOR AFFORDABLE ANIMAL WELFARE

In Dhaka, the streets are full of life, humans and animals alike. While the need for veterinary care is clear, the challenges in accessing affordable and quality services remain a great hurdle for many. High costs and logistical barriers to available facilities are common roadblocks faced by pet owners and animal lovers.

So, what can be the solution?

The state of current veterinary services
The availability of veterinary services in Dhaka has expanded over the years but is still insufficient. There is a mix of government-run and private veterinary facilities. While government-run clinics provide affordable options, many avoid them due to misconceptions about hygiene and quality.

Ferdous Utsho, a cat owner, dispels these myths, sharing, "There is a misconception that government pet hospitals are not hygienic or well-equipped but this is not true. I took my cat to Central Veterinary Hospital to get it vaccinated, and there was no visiting fee. I only paid for the vaccine. Yes, I had to hold my cat myself as there weren't enough assistants, but I was okay with it."

Private veterinary clinics, on the other hand, are better equipped and offer advanced treatments. However, their services come with a hefty price tag making them inaccessible for a significant portion of the population, especially those caring for stray animals.

Sabiha Ferdous, a veterinarian at Pranicool Animal Wellness Clinic, acknowledges this dilemma, stating, "We try our best to make veterinary services as affordable as possible. For example, if someone is a student or rescuing a stray animal, we try to offer special discounts. However, people need to understand that we have to maintain a clinic, bring in medicines, and pay our staff."

She added, "Cost is a big factor for us too. Still, if there is no other way, we suggest the wounded animals be taken to government hospitals. From our end, we always try to ensure that both the animals and their owners receive the best treatment within a reasonable charge."

The struggle of stray animal rescuers
Caring for stray animals is a labour of love, often funded out of pocket. Yet, the scale of the problem can overwhelm even the most dedicated animal lovers.

Joyeeta Trisha, a professional photographer and animal lover, shares, "You can help five, six, or ten strays, but you cannot support all of them – at least I couldn't. Crowdfunding is a good option. Post on an animal lovers' group or your Facebook wall and ask for help.

"It has worked for me previously. However, fraudsters misuse pictures of wounded animals to collect funds. I would advise having proof, such as a prescription from the vet, before posting for crowdfunding."

The government must play a supportive role in addressing the challenges of stray animals. Vaccination and sterilisation programmes can help control the stray population humanely while ensuring public health.

Trisha adds, "How much can we animal lovers do? We need help from the government. If they take the initiative to vaccinate and sterilise strays, the problem can be solved to a large extent."

Moreover, caring for strays does not have to be an individual effort. Joyeeta emphasises, "If the entire community comes together to care for the strays in a locality, the process becomes easier and more beautiful."

Affordable alternatives for animal care
Caring for stray animals in a city like Dhaka, where resources are limited and the number of animals is overwhelming, can feel like an uphill battle. However, there are practical and cost-effective alternatives that can make stray care more manageable without compromising the quality of care provided.

In certain cases, basic human medications can be safely administered to animals, provided they are used under the guidance of a veterinarian.

Veterinarian Sabiha Ferdous explains, "One must remember that a professional vet will handle the animal in the best way possible. I always advise bringing the animal to a vet whenever possible."

Several NGOs like the PAW Foundation and Care for Paws, are actively involved in animal welfare. We can reach out to these NGOs for assistance with medical treatments or sterilisation drives. Also, volunteering on our part can be a great way to care for the animals properly.

In the end, making veterinary services accessible and affordable is not just about improving animal care, it reflects the values of a compassionate society. A collaborative effort between individuals, communities, and government can transform the current challenges into opportunities for better animal welfare.

By Ayman Anika
Photo: Shadab Shahrokh Hai
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