

Micro-Chipping part 2

The spread of the Microchip

The Lifechip, more commonly known as the Microchip was introduced into Japan in 1997 and approved by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries as a medical tool. Although the microchip is used widely for the registration of dogs in Asia (Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan) and in Europe and America, its popularity in Japan is still low. This is because there is no obligation on the part of owners to get their pets micro-chipped and it is not yet recognized as part of the registration process. However since the new Animal Protection Law came into effect in 2000 and it has become the duty of owners to put some ID on their pets, recognition of the microchip is slowly growing.

The reasons for the Microchip's popularity are;
its use internationally since it must conform to international standards,
the virtual immobility of the chip once implanted
access to the pet's data is easy since it is stored at a central data base.

At present about 800 animal clinics (10%) in Japan have a microchip scanner but the spread is uneven. For example, nearly all veterinary clinics in Hyogo Prefecture, reflecting the influence of the Great Hanshin Earthquake, can implant microchips. Aichi and Osaka Prefectures are also areas of high use. At the request of the Veterinary Associations some hokenshos also have scanners.

Although the microchip is not yet legally obligatory for pet animals in Japan, animal lovers, veterinary associations and public animal-related organizations can help promote it to pet owners.

In the future the microchip will be able to perform even more functions, such as reading a pet's temperature or monitoring a pet at home by using the GPS function of a satellite connected to a personal computer. Medical data stored in the chip will also speed up animal hospital services by means of electronic records, instead of a hand-written carte and animal health insurance companies will offer reduced rates for micro-chipped pets. We can say that the Microchip is the beginning of animal protection in the 21st Century.

The purpose of the Microchip

Control of infectious diseases

The present dog registration system in Japan is mainly for the prevention of rabies. If the microchip becomes obligatory at the time of registration, as it is in many foreign countries, information regarding the owner and if the dog has had its current rabies inoculation, would be instantly available.

Although there has been no case of rabies in Japan since 1957, South Korea has had cases of people contracting rabies as recently as 1999. The number of registered dogs in Japan in 2000 was 5,880,000, of which 4,610,000 or 79.7% had had a rabies shot. However since it is estimated that the total number of dogs is about 10 million (including unregistered and strays) the number inoculated against rabies is only half, a worrying situation. Many veterinarians fear the possibility of an outbreak of rabies in this country.

Management of dogs

Stray dogs are a big problem in many countries. Many are lost pets. Microchipping identification would reduce the number of lost pets being needlessly killed by public authorities.

From the viewpoint of animal protection

The main purpose of animal protection is to encourage owner's responsibility. But even if an owner is careful, their pet may go missing. Microchipping helps insure that a lost pet can be reunited with their owner.

Although there are laws in many countries for the protection of animals, this still doesn't stop abuse or abandonment. Moreover irresponsible owners of often unregistered problem dogs (which may have bitten somebody) cannot be easily taken to court and many cases remain unsolved. Compulsory microchipping could identify these owners and people who abandon dogs could also be traced.

In Japan in 2000, out of 151,574 stray dogs captured 15,336 (10%) were returned to their owners.

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