



American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior  
[www.AVSABonline.org](http://www.AVSABonline.org)

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](http://www.dacvb.org)), the American Veterinary Society of Animal Behavior (AVSAB; [www.avsabonline.org](http://www.avsabonline.org)) and the Society of Veterinary Behavior Technicians (SVBT; [www.svbt.org](http://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.



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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

Kelly Morgan, DVM

Valli Parthasarathy, PhD, DVM

Sophia Yin, DVM MS

Laurie Bergman, VMD, DACVB