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# Trends

magazine



# TEAMS OF THE FUTURE III

Where Are  
We Headed? **26**

**The Power of Language**  
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# Trends

AAHA

magazine

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## American Animal Hospital Association

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*Trends magazine* provides timely perspectives on the art and business of companion animal veterinary practice to all members of the practice team.

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# RECOMBINANT VACCINES: How They Differ and Why

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Aside from the health and economic devastation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, public awareness of infectious disease terms and technologies has escalated over the past 2 years. Consider just a few: herd health, coronavirus, spike proteins, viral variants, mRNA, and recombinant vaccines. The list goes on. There is no question that in both human and veterinary medicine, vaccines and vaccination have taken center stage.

Recent technologic advances in human and veterinary vaccines have introduced enhanced safety and efficacy for an ever-increasing number of pathogenic viruses and bacteria.<sup>1,2</sup> But, for any veterinarian in clinical practice, the challenge turns to keeping up with these advances and understanding how the technology benefits the individual patient.

## RECOMBINANT VACCINE TECHNOLOGY

Recombinant vaccine technology is arguably the most recent significant advancement in veterinary immunology and has been the subject of numerous publications and research for over 40 years. It was in 1997 that the first recombinant vaccine

for canine distemper was licensed—RECOMBITEK® Distemper by Merial (now Boehringer Ingelheim Animal Health). Recombinant vaccines are also available for canine Lyme disease, feline rabies, and feline leukemia virus.

Recombinant vaccine technology differs significantly from conventional inactivated (killed) and attenuated (modified-live) vaccines in that recombinant vaccines do not entail inoculating the patient with whole virus or bacteria to deliver the immunizing antigen. Instead, discrete genetic code(s) within a pathogenic virus or bacteria are isolated and enabled to express one, or more, specific proteins (the immunizing antigens). It is truly a targeted approach to immunization.

## IT'S A FACT

Veterinarians today have a growing array of canine and feline vaccines to choose from. Knowledge that different technologies are now employed in manufacturing vaccines for the same disease is fundamental. Understanding what a particular technology does, or does not provide becomes an even more important factor when selecting and using vaccines in practice.

Recombinant vaccine technology enables the patient to produce discrete antibodies that specifically target the most vulnerable components of the infectious pathogen. It does this with a high degree of safety and efficacy. And it achieves sustained protective immunity without the risk of exposure to non-immunizing, potentially reactive proteins associated with whole cell and other conventional virus vaccine preparations. In addition, and unique to the recombinant canine distemper vaccine, is the fact that the canarypox vector virus is not recognized by maternally derived distemper antibody, resulting in protection of young dogs weeks earlier than conventional modified-live virus distemper vaccines.<sup>5</sup>

## Richard B. Ford, DVM, MS

Diplomate ACVIM and (Hon) ACVPM  
Emeritus Professor of Medicine  
North Carolina State University

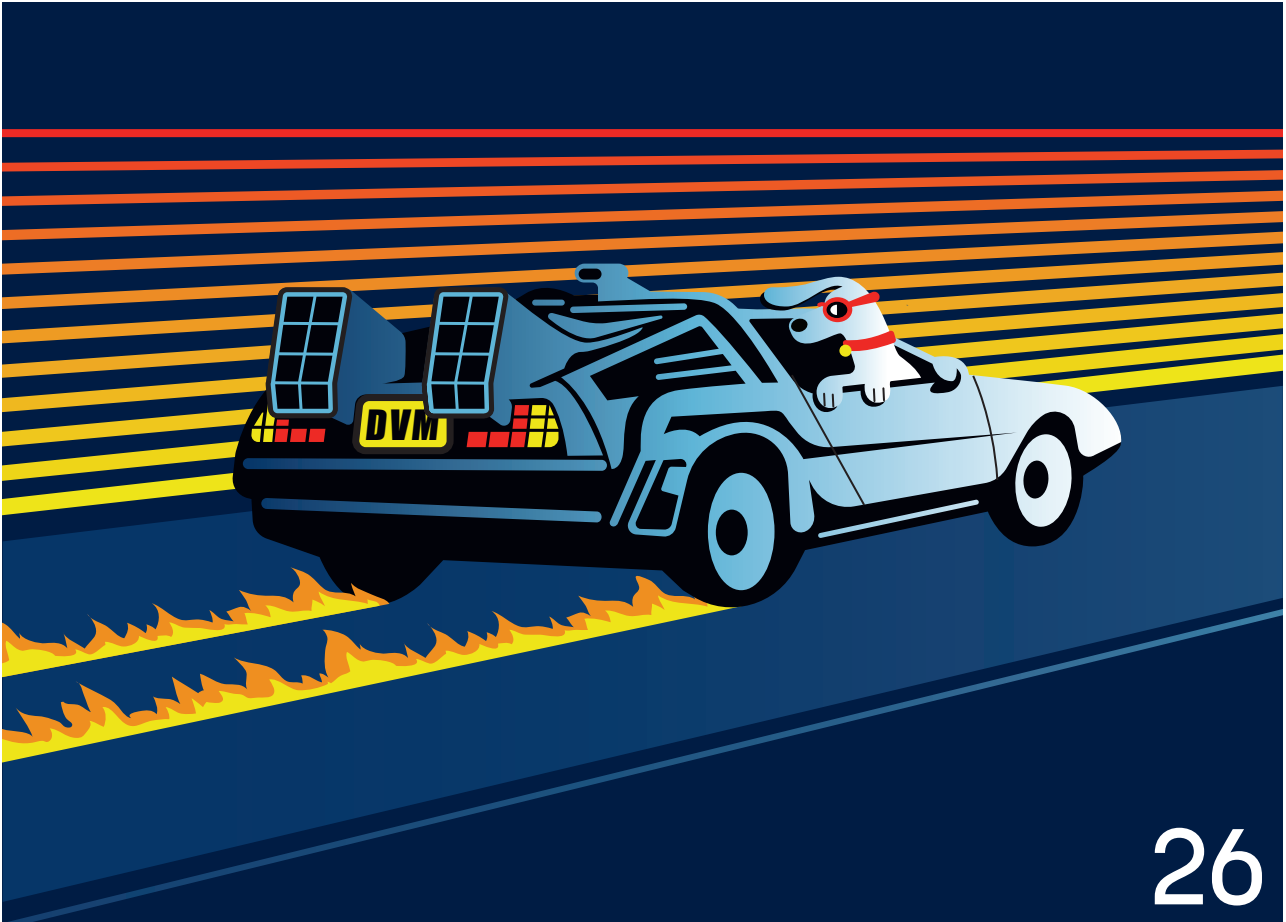
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US-PET-0154-2023

### In veterinary medicine, 2 types of recombinant vaccines are currently in use:

- 1) Viral-vectored vaccines, in which the specific genetic code(s) isolated from the pathogenic virus is recombined with the DNA of a benign transport (vector) virus (eg, canarypox virus). Following vaccination, antigen is expressed, resulting in robust B-cell (antibody) and T-cell (cell-mediated immunity) responses and sustained protection. Example: the RECOMBITEK® Distemper vaccine expresses 2 antigens (fusion and hemagglutinin). The PUREVAX® feline rabies vaccine expresses the glycoprotein G antigen.<sup>3</sup>
- 2) Sub-unit, DNA-expressed vaccines entail isolating a specific genetic code from a pathogenic bacteria (eg, *Borrelia burgdorferi*). The DNA code is recombined with plasmid DNA where the outer surface protein A (OspA) antigen, the sub-unit, is expressed in vitro, isolated, and made available in pure form as a vaccine. Example: the RECOMBITEK® Lyme vaccine.<sup>4</sup>





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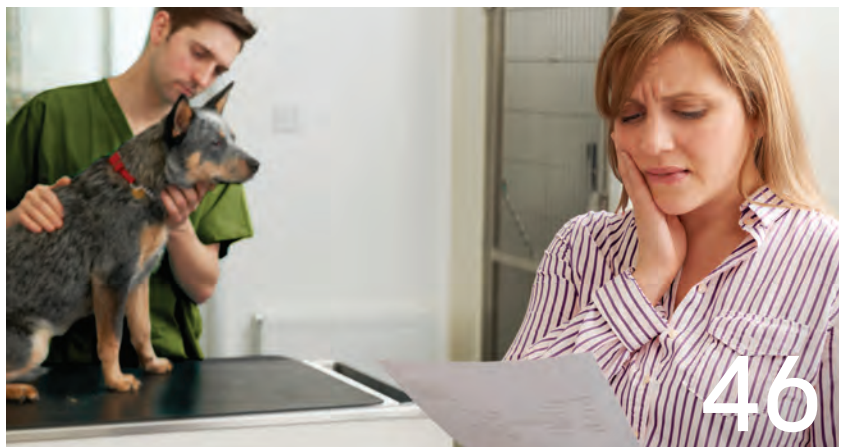
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## From the Editor

June is Pride month, and here at AAHA we are very proud to support all the efforts in our industry that move Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) forward. To that end, this issue is devoted to those efforts. Our cover story is on Teams of the Future. While I would love to believe that the flux capacitor (which makes time travel possible) is real, in reality, teams of the future are already in the making. These teams are diverse, tech-savvy, and cohesive—bonding through culture and technology to bring patient care and client service to 22nd century levels and beyond. Save the clock tower!\*

Our second feature is on second languages, and their importance in bonding with clients and creating channels leading to greater compliance. As a bilingual person, I can personally appreciate the importance of this ability. When someone does not expect to be understood, and then all of a sudden is understood, you can literally see the power of language at work.

Another less obvious facet of DEIB has to do with the perception of what it means to dress in “professional attire.” When I first started at AAHA 15 years ago, male employees were expected to wear button down shirts and dress pants. Women were expected to wear skirts of a certain length and pantyhose. Now, most of us work remotely and wear t-shirts (or at least casual attire). In vet med, gone are the days when all doctors wear white lab coats. Now, many practitioners prefer scrubs, and tattoos and piercings are welcome expressions of personal body autonomy.

All are welcome in the new age of pride and inclusiveness. Welcome to the future!


### **Nominate Your Employee of the Month**

Now, do us all a favor and head over to [aaha.org/EOTM](http://aaha.org/EOTM) to nominate one of your co-workers for the Employee of the Month contest, and you could win \$100 for yourself, and \$400 for your nominee. There is no catch—it’s free to enter and you get free money!

### **Coming Next Month**

In July we have articles on end-of-life care, an update on nutritional management of aerodigestive disorders, and information on treating exotics.

As always, let me know what you think at [trends@aaha.org](mailto:trends@aaha.org).

  
**Ben Williams**  
Editor

\*Please excuse my “Back to the Future” references; I can’t help it.



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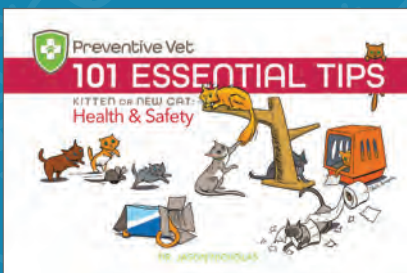
# A starter kit for your new pet owners!

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## Contributors



**Cherice Roth, DVM, MS**

Cherice Roth, DVM, MS, is a proud graduate of Texas A&M School of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. She is Chief Veterinary Officer of Digital Pet Health for Mars Veterinary Health, a mom, an author, and is well-known in the veterinary industry as a leader and innovator. She is the author of children's books *What's a REAL Doctor?* and *What does a REAL Doctor look like?*



**Roxanne Hawn**

Roxanne Hawn brings 25+ years of experience writing about veterinary topics for professionals and consumers. She is the author of *Heart Dog: Surviving the Loss of Your Canine Soul Mate*. Hawn fosters litters of puppies until old enough for adoption as well as hit-by-car dogs needing time to heal and rehab injuries.



**Maureen Blaney Flietner**

Maureen Blaney Flietner has covered the veterinary profession for *Trends* since 2011. The award-winning freelancer and former newspaper staff writer and editor also has written for the healthcare, personal finance, green building technology, and other sectors.



**Lavanya Sunkara**

Lavanya Sunkara is a New York City-based writer with two cats and a dog. She barely recalls what the staff wore when her elderly dog ended up in the ER at a VEG practice, but remembers having a warm and comforting experience with the contented staff there.

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# The Staffing and Retention Effect

**A**s a veterinarian in a busy veterinary clinic, I have had the privilege of witnessing firsthand the challenges and rewards of staffing and retention. In a field where compassion, expertise, and teamwork are crucial, maintaining a motivated and skilled workforce is essential. In this article, I will share my observations and experiences regarding the significance of staffing and retention in a veterinary clinic.

Staffing plays a pivotal role in the smooth functioning of a veterinary clinic. A well-staffed clinic ensures that there are enough hands to provide attentive care to the animals and manage the daily operations effectively. Each team member, from veterinary technicians to receptionists, brings unique skills and perspectives, creating a dynamic environment that fosters growth and learning.

Retaining qualified staff members within a veterinary clinic is vital for maintaining consistency and building long-term relationships with clients. High turnover can disrupt the workflow, impact team morale, and potentially compromise the quality of care provided to the animals.

Therefore, implementing strategies to bolster staff retention is crucial.

Creating and maintaining a positive work environment is key to staff retention. A veterinary clinic should strive to foster a culture of respect, open communication, and collaboration. Encouraging teamwork, recognizing achievements, and providing a supportive atmosphere can make a significant difference in staff satisfaction and loyalty.

Investing in the professional growth and development of the staff is an effective way to retain talented individuals. As a veterinarian, I encourage and support continuing education, certifications, and specialized training for my team members. This not only enhances their skills and knowledge but also demonstrates my commitment to their success. Such investment fosters a sense of value and purpose, motivating employees to stay and contribute their best.

Recognizing and rewarding the efforts of my staff members is essential in maintaining their dedication and enthusiasm. Celebrating achievements, acknowledging milestones, and providing incentives such as

bonuses or flexible schedules can go a long way in boosting morale and job satisfaction. By showing genuine appreciation and recognizing their hard work, I strive to create an environment where staff members feel valued and motivated to continue working with us.

Staffing and retention are critical factors that contribute to the success and sustainability of any veterinary clinic. As a veterinarian, I understand the importance of fostering a positive work environment, investing in professional development, recognizing staff efforts, and promoting work–life balance. These strategies not only contribute to staff satisfaction but also enhance the quality of care provided to our animal patients. By prioritizing the wellbeing and growth of my team, I am confident in the continued success of our veterinary clinic.

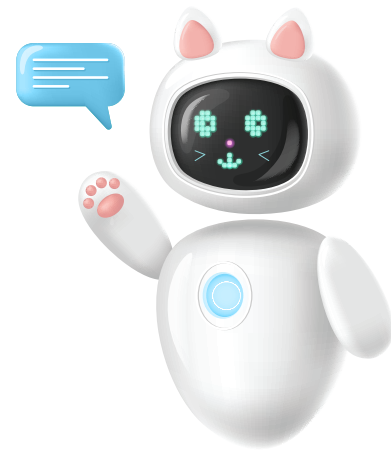


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**Mark Thompson, DVM, CCRP**, is president of AAHA. He owns Country Hills Pet Hospital in Eden, Wisconsin.



# The Scoop



## Quote of the Month

"Accept no one's definition of your life; define yourself."

Harvey Fierstein, actor and playwright known for advocating for LGBTQ+ rights

### Cornell Feline Health Center Launches Playful CatGPT

CatGPT is more than just a fun AI chatbot that answers questions about feline health. It's part of a larger, multipronged Cornell experiment with artificial intelligence.

The Cornell Feline Health Center (CFHC) in the College of Veterinary Medicine recently launched CatGPT to help connect cat owners with credible, science-based information in a novel way. Users can ask the chatbot questions about their cats, get answers quickly, and ask follow-up questions. CatGPT can even play games.

The chatbot uses articles from CFHC's website as well as a database of abstracts from peer-reviewed scientific

publications as sources of information for answering user inquiries. The tool has a chatty, playful tone.

CatGPT is available in OpenAI's ChatGPT app store; for now, access requires a subscription to ChatGPT Plus.

"Cornell has been a leader in AI and machine learning for research and instructional purposes for many years," said Ben Maddox, chief information officer for Cornell's Ithaca campus and Cornell Tech. He and his team hope to glean insights from CatGPT that will be useful to Cornell's broader approach to AI.



### FDA Approves Treatment for Yeast Ear Infections in Dogs

Recently, the US Food and Drug Administration approved DuOtic (terbinafine and betamethasone acetate otic gel) for the treatment of otitis externa in dogs, associated with susceptible strains of yeast (*Malassezia pachydermatis*).

The first FDA-approved animal drug intended to treat yeast-only otitis externa in dogs, DuOtic is also the first otic drug intended to treat otitis externa that does not contain an antibiotic. This allows veterinarians to focus treatment and avoid using antibiotics when dogs have diagnosed yeast-only ear infections.

DuOtic is a fixed combination of the two active substances: terbinafine and betamethasone acetate. The treatment acts to fight yeast infections for up to 45 days. It dissolves in earwax and is slowly eliminated from the ear.



### 3D-Printed Animal Eyes for Ophthalmology Training Developed at K-State

Veterinary students can now use 3D-printed eye globes that replicate the eyes of dogs, cats, horses, and rabbits to learn the coordination skills of an ophthalmoscope. The model eye globes were developed by the Kansas State University Technology Development Institute with the College of Veterinary Medicine. Students can now perform direct and indirect funduscopy exams to check the back of the inside of

the eye, including the retina and optic nerve.

The models are based on photographic images captured by the ophthalmologists at the College of Veterinary Medicine. The College's Susan Rose, clinical skills instructor, and Shane Lyon, DVM, clinical associate professor and clinical skills coordinator, conceived the idea for the training aid to teach their freshman and sophomore veterinary students

↑ Kansas State University's Technology Development Institute and College of Veterinary Medicine teamed up to create 3D-printed animal eye models for veterinary students to use when training for funduscopy exams.

hand skills for eye exams. A goal for their courses is to reduce the use of live animals in teaching basic skills.

## Digital/AAHA Survey: Nearly 40% of Veterinary Professionals Use AI Tools

Practice management software company Digitail has released the results of a recent survey on veterinary professionals' impressions and use of artificial intelligence (AI). The survey was conducted in coordination with AAHA and collected responses from thousands of veterinary professionals.

"While it is premature to state that AI is ready for universal implementation in veterinary medicine, it's evident that it currently serves as a viable tool with specific applications, said Sebastian Gabor, CEO at Digitail. Read the results of the survey at: [links.digitail.com/ai\\_vet\\_med\\_study](https://links.digitail.com/ai_vet_med_study).

### Highlights from the survey include:

Respondents using AI tools or software in their veterinary setting

**39.2%**



**69.5%**

of those respondents report using them daily or weekly

Professionals interested in incorporating AI tools into their practice in the near future

**38.7%**

Interested

**15.5%**

Opposed

Most prevalent concern among respondents

**70.3%**

Reliability and accuracy of AI systems

**53.9%**

Data security and privacy



There is a direct correlation



between the use of AI tools and the level of enthusiasm toward this technology



## Novel Research Leverages AI to Identify Dogs at Higher Risk for Cancer

A novel cancer study funded by Morris Animal Foundation and the Golden Retriever Foundation is leveraging artificial intelligence to pioneer an innovative approach to early detection and prevention for dogs susceptible to developing diffuse large B-cell lymphoma (DLBCL), the most common form of this deadly cancer.

A team of researchers at the

University of Minnesota is testing a new approach coined "test and intervene," using AI to analyze pieces of DNA fragments in blood. Findings may help identify dogs at higher risk for DLBCL. The team plans to provide pet owners and veterinarians with intervention strategies to help lower the risk in identified dogs.

The research team will develop

the test using a comprehensive evaluation of a large group of dogs and an analysis of samples from Morris Animal Foundation's Golden Retriever Lifetime Study to identify DNA patterns in the blood before cancer development.

This initiative differs from similar projects by attempting to assess canine cancer risk through a Lymphoma Risk Assessment test.

## Feline Genome Probed for Future Disease Studies

The Morris Animal Foundation reports that researchers have delved into various cat species' entire DNA sequence (genome), uncovering novel perspectives on domestic and wild cat evolution. They state that this new work highlights distinct genetic changes and will be a critical tool for researchers investigating feline diseases and characteristics.

This study, which was published in the journal *Nature Genetics*, used cutting-edge genome sequencing and assembly technologies to generate a more

comprehensive and complete cat genome assembly, providing fundamental information on the feline blueprint and aiding in advancements in feline medicine.

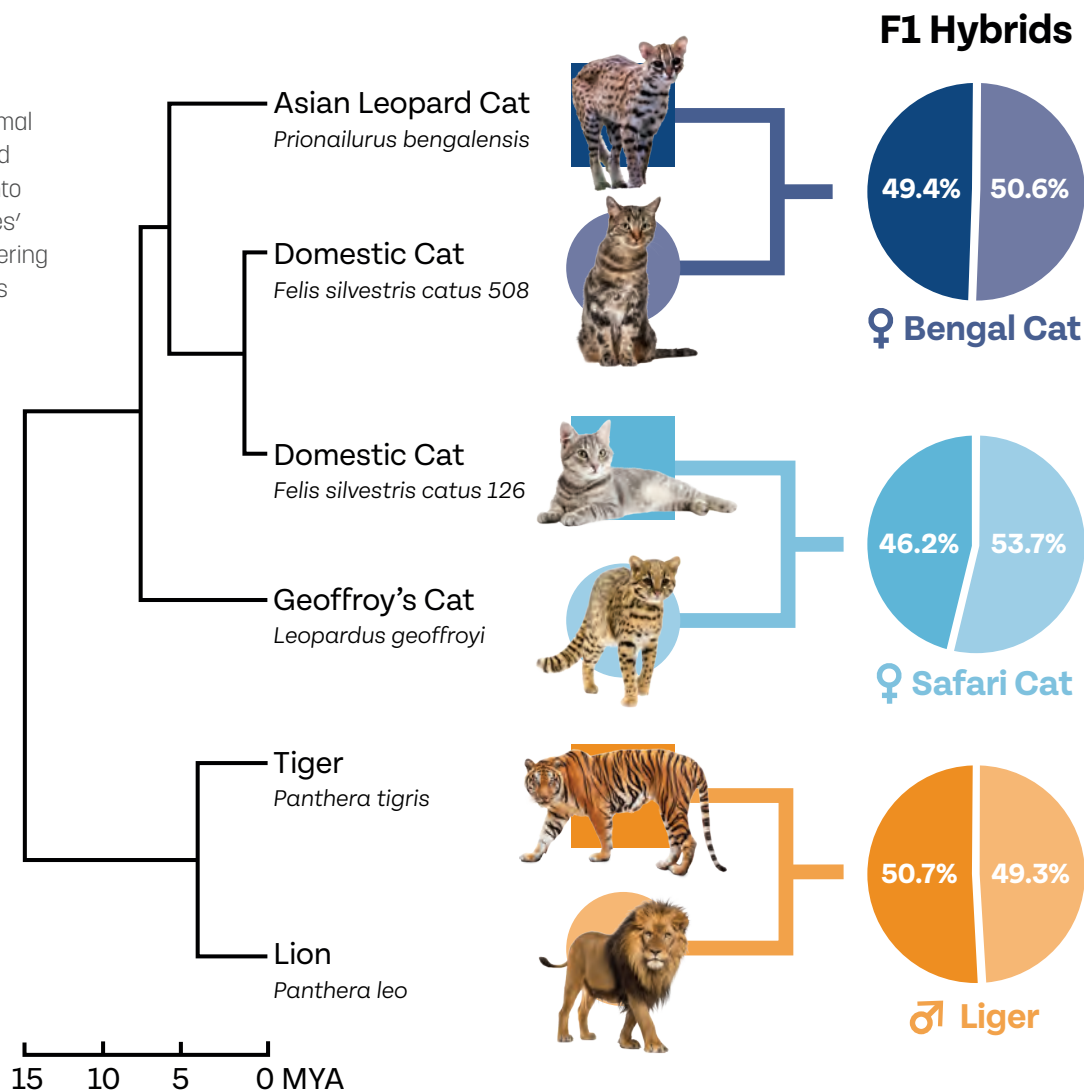
"This is an ongoing effort because it's very difficult to fill in the missing gaps in the genome sequence, and those gaps aren't just junk," said William Murphy, PhD, the study's principal investigator and Professor of Veterinary Integrative Biosciences at Texas A&M University.

During the study, Murphy and his team identified fewer segmental

duplications—duplicated blocks of genomic DNA—in cats compared with other mammal groups while also learning that numerous variances exist in feline DNA. These insights are crucial for those studying feline diseases, behavior, and conservation, Murphy said.

"This initial study was just scratching the surface," Murphy said. "Now we're going to be able to use this to go in and start determining the function of parts of the domestic cat genome that were missing before."

→ The Morris Animal Foundation-funded research delves into various cat species' entire DNA, uncovering novel perspectives on domestic and wild cat evolution.





## Community

We have a new technician joining our team and are very excited! We have the usual new hire onboarding docs ready (handbooks, policies, etc.) but I am wondering what other resources or information you wish you had when you first joined a team?

**A:** We put together a small “Yearbook” for new hires complete with each staff’s special skills, communication styles, and other important information and fun facts.

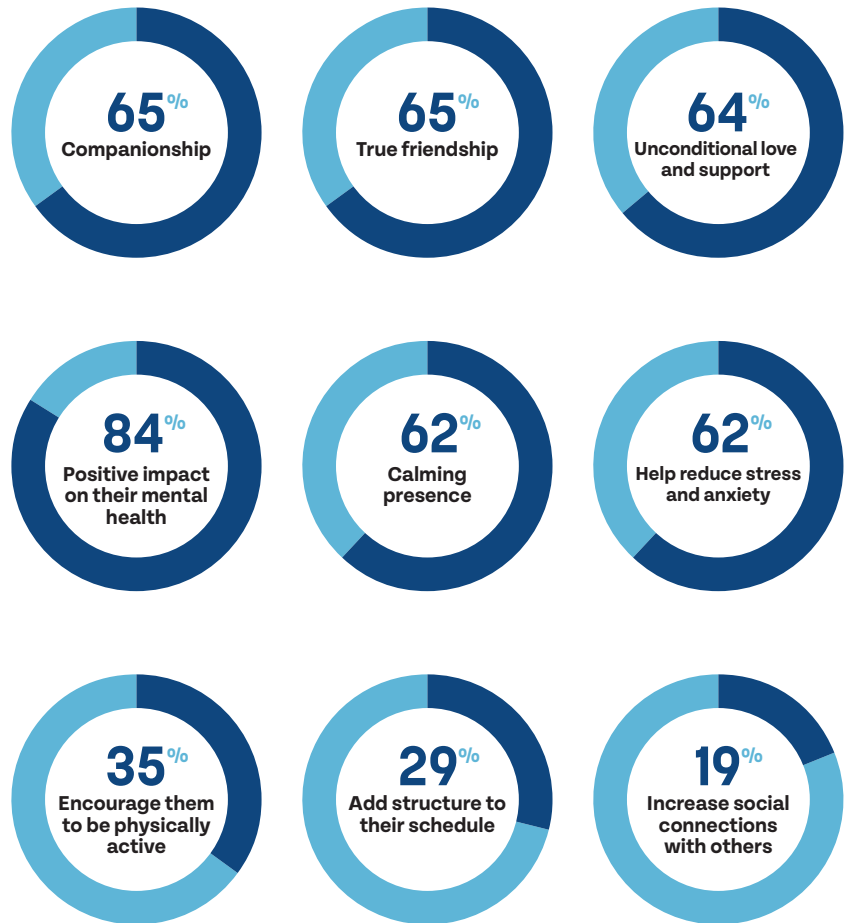
**A:** Our team creates a small greeting basket where each staff member picks out a gift under 10 dollars. It’s a great way to welcome your new hire and allow the team to express their personalities through the gifts they choose.

**AAHA members, share your onboarding suggestions and wish lists with the Community at [community.aaaha.org](http://community.aaaha.org). For help, email [community@aaaha.org](mailto:community@aaaha.org).**

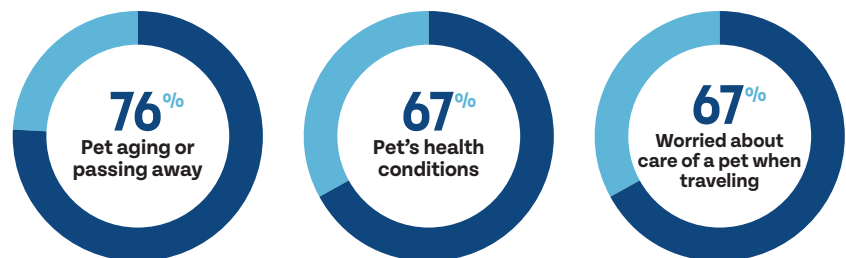
## Americans’ Pets and Their Owners

The results of an American Psychiatric Association Healthy Minds Monthly Poll, released jointly with the American Veterinary Medical Association, reveal the many mental health benefits of pets as well as pet owners’ concerns and identification (cat or dog person, etc.).

### Pet owners say that their animals offer:



### Top concerns about pets:



Source: [psychiatry.org/News-room/News-Releases/Pets-Offer-Mental-Health-Support-to-Their-Owners](http://psychiatry.org/News-room/News-Releases/Pets-Offer-Mental-Health-Support-to-Their-Owners)

## Molecule from Keto Diet May Slow Alzheimer's Disease

A new study from researchers at the University of California-Davis shows a ketogenic diet significantly delays the early stages of Alzheimer's-related memory loss in mice. This early memory loss is comparable to mild cognitive impairment in humans that precedes full-blown Alzheimer's disease. The study was published in the Nature Group journal *Communications Biology*.

The ketogenic diet is a low-carbohydrate, high-fat, and moderate-protein diet, which shifts the body's metabolism from using glucose to burning fat and producing ketones for energy.

The study found that the molecule beta-hydroxybutyrate, or BHB, plays a pivotal role in preventing early memory decline. It increases almost sevenfold on the ketogenic diet.

"The data support the idea that the ketogenic diet in general, and BHB specifically, delays mild cognitive impairment and it may delay full blown Alzheimer's disease," said co-corresponding author Gino Cortopassi, PhD, a biochemist and pharmacologist with the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine.

Scientists gave mice enough BHB to simulate the benefits of being on the keto diet for 7 months.

## Concerns About Shorter Lifespans for Pets Can Drive Owner Action on Obesity

In obesity-related conversations with owners of overweight cats and dogs, what information from a veterinarian is most likely to motivate owners to help their pet lose weight? Researchers from the Ontario Veterinary College at the University of Guelph addressed this question in two studies published recently in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*.

The researchers conducted separate dog- and cat-focused surveys in which participants were asked to rank the relative importance of various health-related issues that could result from obesity.

Among both dog and cat owners, obesity's impact on the life expectancy of their pets was the issue most likely to convince them to pursue weight management.

## Funds Raised for Dog Lifespan Extension Drug Now Total \$125M

Loyal, a biotechnology company developing longevity medications for dogs, has announced the conclusion of its Series B financing phase, securing \$45 million in investment, with Bain Capital Ventures spearheading the round. With this latest investment, Loyal has amassed more than \$125 million in funds since its establishment in 2019.

"This fundraiser fuels our efforts to bring to market what we hope will be the first FDA-approved drug to extend healthy lifespans," says Celine Halioua, founder and CEO of Loyal.

This funding supports the continued development of the drug, with expected product launch in early 2025, pending FDA approval.

Three medications aimed at prolonging the healthy lifespan of dogs are in development: LOY-001 and LOY-003, tailored to enhance the healthy lifespan of large-breed dogs, and LOY-002, specifically designed for senior dogs weighing 14 pounds and above.





### BluePearl Announces Veterinary Partnership with US Army

In a new military-civilian veterinary partnership program, BluePearl specialists will offer veterinary care training to US Army veterinarians to improve their abilities to treat Military Working Dogs (MWDs) combat casualties. The US Army Veterinary Corps provides medical and surgical care to more than 1,600 MWDs on active duty.

The new Veterinary Trauma Readiness and Operational Medicine Agility (Vet-TROMA) program was developed in partnership with the US Army Office of the Surgeon General and US Army Veterinary Corps. US Army veterinary personnel in the program complete 67 hours of distance learning followed by a three-week clinical rotation at BluePearl sites. Vet-TROMA is currently offered at two BluePearl hospitals, with plans to expand to additional BluePearl locations.

### Virtual Tool for Studying Gene Function Developed by Texas A&M

A new virtual tool, Gene Knockout Inference (GenKI), will allow scientists to study the function of genes more efficiently and reduce the number of animal models used in genetic research. The tool was developed by researchers at the Texas A&M School of Veterinary Medicine & Biomedical Sciences (VMBS).

Using GenKI, scientists can simulate the relationship between genes in individual cells and study which genes affect cellular functions. Understanding the

purpose of each gene is essential for developing new treatments for everything from cancer to the common flu.

With this virtual tool, researchers can study cross-tissue response, or the relationship that genes may have between multiple tissues, organs, and systems. They can also study genes that they wouldn't be able to study otherwise and to answer questions earlier in their research than would be possible when using tissues.



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# 5 Questions for a Rehabilitation Specialist

## 1 What made you choose your specialty area?

I felt there was a need for specialists in canine sports medicine and rehabilitation. There felt like a huge gap between the general practice veterinarian and the orthopedic/neurologic specialist and even between veterinarians certified in rehabilitation and orthopedic/neurologic specialists. I also felt there was a need for specialists who understand and work with canine athletes/working dogs and their owners/handlers.

## 2 What is one thing you wish you could tell general practitioners regarding your specialty?

We are different than rehabilitation-certified veterinarians in that we had to go through a residency training program and sit for a specialty boards exam. We have the most thorough understanding of the current literature for diagnostic and treatment options for nonsurgical and postoperative orthopedic and neurologic cases. We are pushing to get more research on pain management, osteoarthritis management and prevention, integrative medicine approaches, postoperative rehabilitation, neurologic rehabilitation, biomechanics and injury prevention in the athlete and working dog, etc.

## Alice Baker Meuten, DVM, DACVSMR, MSTCVM

Alice Baker Meuten, DVM, DACVSMR, MSTCVM, is owner of Canine Performance Rehabilitation and Integrative Sports Medicine (Canine PRISM) in Colorado. In addition to being a boarded rehabilitation and sports medicine veterinary specialist, she has a master's degree in traditional Chinese veterinary medicine, is certified by the American Veterinary Chiropractic Association, is a Certified Veterinary Acupuncturist, and is a Certified Canine Rehabilitation Therapist. She also competes nationally in border collie sheepdog trials.



## 3 What is one thing that pet owners could do that would make your job more satisfying?

Follow through with at-home recommendations. Most of the time, adding just a few minutes every day to do prescribed exercises at home is going to make bigger long-term changes in your dog than doing in-clinic rehabilitation once or twice a week.

## 4 What is the most rewarding part of your job?

The dedication I see in my clients in keeping their dogs as fit and injury-free as possible. If I comment that their dog's nails are

too long, forever after their dog will have perfectly trimmed nails prior to our appointments. If I give them refinements on exercises they are doing at home, they figure out how to help their dog do them better.

## 5 What advice would you give to someone considering your specialty?

We are a growing specialty with so many potential career avenues. If you love geriatrics, athletes, working dogs, postop orthopedics, nonsurgical orthopedics, neurologic disorders, orthotics/prosthetics, nutrition, integrative medicine, etc., there is an avenue to make this specialty work for you.

If you  
feel like  
you're drowning  
in fluid therapy  
questions, the **2024  
AAHA Fluid Therapy  
Guidelines** have answers.



**Look to the Fluid Therapy Guidelines for:**

- How to recognize the early signs of fluid overload.
- Anesthesia fluid rates and treatment for hypotension.
- How to correct hypernatremia and hyponatremia.
- Frequently asked questions about fluid therapy.
- Understanding how to view fluids as drugs that are prescribed to patients and used in a way that achieves therapeutic goals and minimizes complications.

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These guidelines provide a detailed refresher on the basic principles of fluid therapy and guide the busy practitioner through a variety of common scenarios where fluids are used—from anesthesia, to resuscitation, to treatment of the sick patient.



**Guidelines**

The *2024 AAHA Fluid Therapy Guidelines for Dogs and Cats* are coming this summer to **aaaha.org** with answers to your challenging fluid therapy questions!



AAHA MEMBER

# Employee of the Month

## Monika Airas

**Customer Care Representative Team Lead**

Pouncey Tract Veterinary Hospital,  
Glen Allen, Virginia

Year started in vet medicine: 2008

Years with practice: 8

Nominated by Megan Cram

### Why is Monika so awesome?

Monika walks in with a smile every morning and always puts her teammates, the pets, and the clients above everything else.

### How does she go above and beyond?

Monika takes it upon herself to personally advocate for her teammates and she goes out of her way for each and every pet and owner that comes in the door.



Each month in *Trends*, we will spotlight a team member from an accredited practice. Does your team boast an outstanding veterinarian, veterinary technician, veterinary assistant, customer service representative, or kennel worker? Nominate your employee at [aaha.org/EOTM](http://aaha.org/EOTM), and you and your employee can win \$500 in gift cards courtesy of CareCredit!\*

\*The Employee of the Month contest is administered by AAHA.

## In their own words:



### Why do you love your job:

I am passionate about bringing joy to our clients, advocating for my teammates, and providing excellent service for both pets and their owners.



### Pets at home:

A Westie, Sir William Wallace, and a Scottie, Nora.



### What brought you to the profession:

A passion for working with others and a love of pets.



### Hobbies outside of work:

Decorating, reading, being a mother.



### Favorite Celebrity:

Post Malone



### Favorite book/TV show:

*Parenthood*

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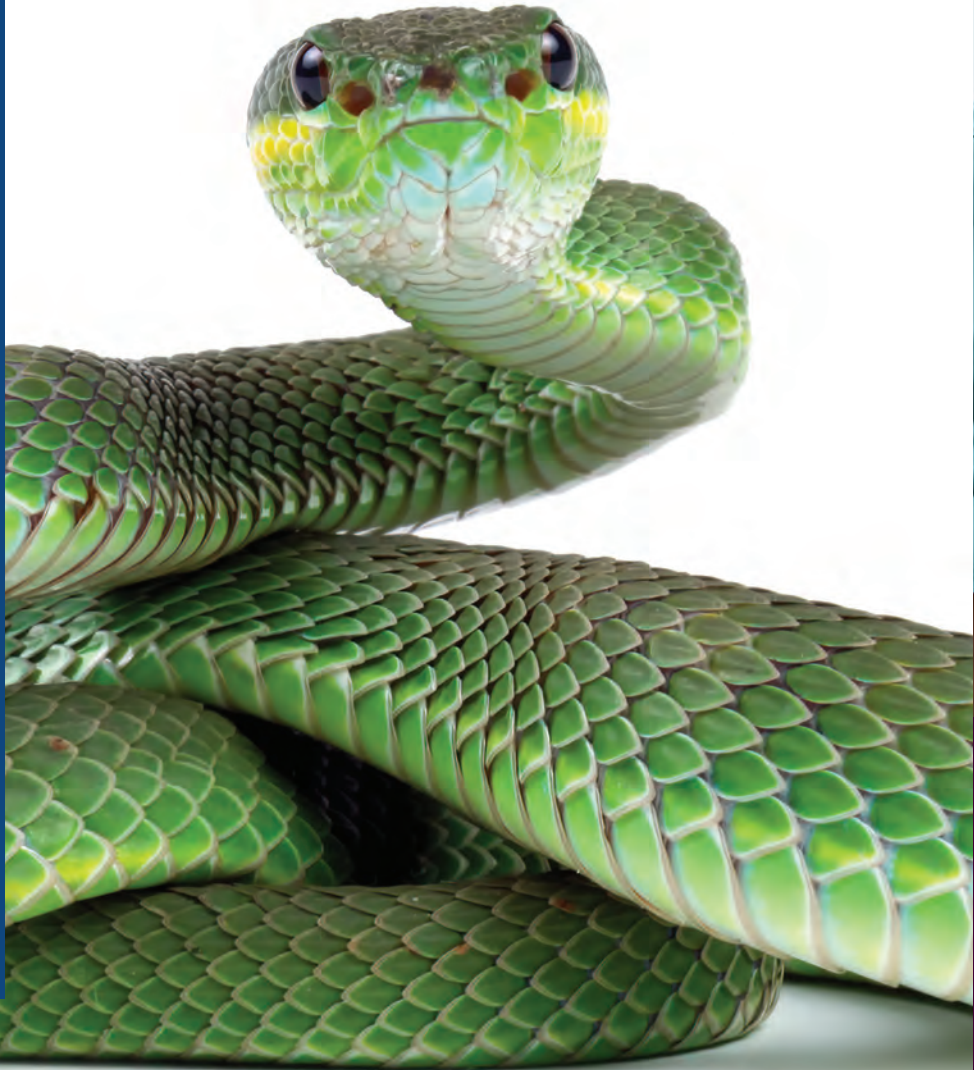


# Case Report of the Month

## Pit Viper Versus Pregnant Dog

Pit viper bites are never a good thing. The powerful venom can cause multisystemic effects as well as significant local tissue damage. Although not very well reported, limited data suggests that bites from these snakes are especially dangerous for pregnant women, and human fetuses can be harmed or even killed as a result of the effects of envenomation. But how survivable is pit viper envenomation for pregnant dogs and their fetuses?

A new case report in the *Journal of the American Animal Hospital Association (JAAHA)* describes two separate cases where a pregnant dog was bitten by a pit viper and taken to a university teaching hospital for treatment. This article is the first description of medical management of pit viper envenomation in two pregnant dogs.



**Find out** how the mothers and puppies fared in the latest issue of *JAAHA*, "**Pit Viper Envenomation in Two Pregnant Bitches**," at [jaaha.org](http://jaaha.org).

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**ENHANCING YOUR VETERINARY  
PRACTICE THROUGH MENTORSHIP**

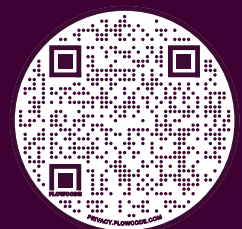
Featuring James Desir, DVM and Alyssa Mages, CVT

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# TEAMS OF THE FUTURE



## Tech-Savvy, Diverse, and Engaged— *There's No Going Back for Vet Med*

BY CHERICE ROTH, DVM, MS

**T**here has never been a better time to be in veterinary medicine. Admittedly, there are many issues in our industry: student debt, burnout, compassion fatigue, and mental health struggles. However, I'm incredibly optimistic about our trajectory because significant transformation is underway across the profession. We've reached a pivotal point where our previously tech-averse, predominantly privileged, White population of veterinary professionals is now becoming more diverse and tech-savvy, focused on self-care and wellbeing. It's the perfect time to be in veterinary medicine because together, we are embracing change.

The ball is in our court; now is the time for true innovation

and diversification of the talent that makes up our profession. It's critical that these changes come from within the industry. We must modify how we operate and build teams so that we can continue providing high-quality medical care and fantastic client experiences at the forefront.

### **Retention Is Key**

For continual improvement to persist, I believe practices must hire diverse, tech-savvy candidates and—more importantly—learn how to retain them. The future of veterinary medical teams will look and behave differently than teams in place today. Technological advances, shifting societal attitudes, and client demographics are driving this trend. The human-animal bond

and evolving client needs and expectations are reshaping the landscape of veterinary medicine and what it means to society, not to mention the evolving needs of our team members. As I see it, we're in the midst of a veterinary technology revolution. It's more important than ever to build future-forward teams that want to stay in the profession, and who want to find out what delivery of excellent animal care will look like in the year 2057. These types of teams are better equipped to meet a more diverse clientele's needs and are more likely to be satisfied, engaged, and committed to long-term employment when they feel included and heard.

I believe a workplace that values diversity, inclusivity, technological advancement, mental health, and wellbeing will likely retain its staff. Those at *Harvard Business Review* agree. They noted in 2018 that having a diverse team where everyone feels included maximizes team engagement and spurs business growth.

In my experience, retention also increases when there is a constant push to improve care and efficiency in the hospital team's day. Many day-to-day tasks like medical record-keeping or other administrative functions remove the veterinary professional from the clinic floor, away from patients and care delivery, and in front of a literal pile of unfinished records and callbacks that require working well into the night. Teams of the future

have the potential to bring a diverse range of perspectives and ideas, leading to more innovative solutions for tough, age-old problems in hospital efficiency. The teams of the future will not miss lunch and will not feel guilty about taking well-deserved, necessary breaks. The better the efficiency, the better the medical care, client interactions, and team engagement.

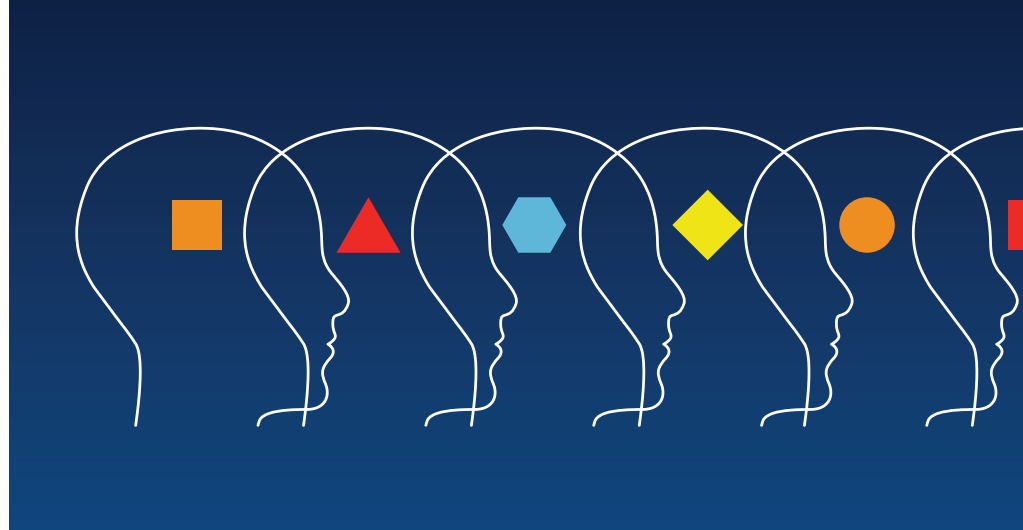
### **Embracing Technology Advances and the Tech-Savvy Employee**

To find team members you've never found before, look in places you've never looked before! For example, they could be working the tech support desk at your favorite consumer electronics store. Even if they're not someone who grew up dreaming of being a veterinarian, team members of the future understand and embrace technology and have the aptitude to serve clients. I've found the best way to find these individuals is within my community, by

interacting with them in their current roles and talking to them about how my practice prioritizes inclusivity and technological advances. In my experience, those of us who are tech-savvy are enthralled by being able to use technology to solve problems. These are the team members of the future that our profession needs.

When used effectively, technology has the potential to reduce the administrative burden on staff, streamline processes, and improve the quality of care. However, this only works if the team sees the infusion of technology into their day-to-day tasks as a positive thing rather than a stressor.

My top suggestion is to evaluate your team's pain points and investigate what technology can solve those pain points. This is the way to garner team support in implementing these new technologies. Rather than bringing in new technology just for the sake of it, make thoughtful decisions that have the potential to meaningfully improve your team's





Teams of the future have the potential to bring a diverse range of perspectives and ideas, leading to more innovative solutions for tough, age-old problems in hospital efficiency.

day-to-day experience, and include your team in the decision-making process and implementation to create an environment people want to remain part of.

Examples of great technology to work into each practice include electronic medical records with dictation of SOAPs, telemedicine, virtual care, IoT monitoring of post-op patients for pain, automated scheduling, and even automated patient follow-up. These technologies not only can improve patient care but also will add new lines of revenue, new role possibilities within the practice, and better communication with clients.

### **Inclusion and Belonging**

Inclusivity is also key and ensures team members feel valued and respected, fostering a positive work environment that promotes team members' willingness to contribute ideas that aid in the betterment of the entire practice. Inclusion only works if you've created a culture of safety and sense of belonging

with it—in my experience, team members who feel included are more likely to feel comfortable making suggestions to improve workflows and patient care.

Gallup emphasizes the importance of fostering a sense of belonging for employee retention. I believe creating a sense of belonging also involves actively eliminating toxicity and embracing diverse perspectives, needs, and experiences. Whereas a lack of belonging or appreciation can contribute to team members' departure, a toxic workplace can have an even more significant impact. When certain team members are perceived as untouchable because of long-standing relationships, it can alienate others and disrupt team dynamics. Addressing this requires a comprehensive onboarding process for new team members and a culture that prioritizes safety, actively encourages feedback, and implements it in daily operations.

*Harvard Business Review* also shares that another component of

inclusion is understanding that only some have learned to be a strong advocate for themselves. To ensure new team members get their needs met, it's crucial to provide guidance on how and when to negotiate for things like compensation, time off, and flexible schedules.

If this type of training is not possible in-house, consider an e-learning course that addresses this and make the course part of your onboarding process. Transparency in compensation structures and regular assessments of pay and promotion disparities are essential to ensure fairness and equity. The ability to show someone what is possible in career trajectory and compensation is key to helping people understand they are separate from the traditional roles of a customer service representative, veterinary assistant, credentialed veterinary technician, or veterinarian. It's important to have a clear strategy for career mapping and to provide adequate time for teams to dedicate to professional growth. If a team

member knows their dedication can lead to career growth and growth for the practice, they are more likely to feel in control of their own destiny and more invested in the team and moving care goals forward. According to PayScale, the effort involved in developing a comprehensive onboarding program, clarifying negotiation possibilities, and maintaining transparency in compensation and promotion levels contributes to building trust and loyalty among team members, increasing the likelihood of their long-term commitment to the practice.

### The Role of Technology in Staff Retention

Technology plays a crucial role in reducing burnout and improving job satisfaction. Using technology to automate administrative tasks is a great way to keep team members engaged and feeling appreciated, as reported by Coombs et al. Investing in resources to help implement new technology directly impacts team retention by allowing for professional growth to occur. According to *Nurse Journal*, automating routine tasks and streamlining processes with technology allows staff to focus on more meaningful work, such as patient care and education on behalf of the patient, rather than being bogged down with tasks that do not require special medical training. Additionally, technology

## Technological advancements in veterinary hospitals can foster a more connected, informed, and engaged professional community.

opens opportunities for career development, such as specialized training, and allows roles to evolve within the practice.

This evolution enhances the team's skills and provides a clear path for career advancement, another key factor in staff retention. Infusing new technology into veterinary hospitals offers exciting opportunities for promoting and engaging professional staff. As *Harvard Business Review* outlines, technology-enhanced professional development allows continuous professional learning and collaboration, all of which are connected to team retention. The new technology provides the opportunity to engage with team members in new ways. Consider assigning a different team member, rather than the usual team leader or senior technician, to introduce or implement new technology. This approach can uncover and nurture previously unrecognized talents in that team member, potentially leading to greater team buy-in and ultimately improved engagement for the selected team member.

Technological advancements

in veterinary hospitals can foster a more connected, informed, and engaged professional community. According to a recent in-depth AAHA study (“Stay, Please”) regarding team turnover, fair compensation, teamwork, modern medicine, and appreciation for their work are among the top retention factors. The benefits of using technology to retain your team include spending less on recruiting, hiring, and training.

Technology investments also create potential for lines of revenue that enable competitive compensation and the ability to provide a living wage that helps retain team members for the long haul. I consider teamwork the perfect blend of feeling like you belong on the team and are included in team decisions, as well as working together as a highly functional and efficient care delivery unit.

The need for more modern medicine is also no surprise to me. There is a drive and passion in our hospital teams to deliver the best care possible. Technology enables the move toward modern medicine, drives engagement and

professional growth, and, in the right hands, opens new lines of revenue to facilitate better wages, all of which lead to retention. The win-win here is clear.

The veterinary team of the future uses aspects of technology to stay engaged and provide top-notch care. Finding these individuals means stepping out of traditional tactics to find new talent and branching out to actively recruit people skilled in the areas in which you want your practice to grow. In my opinion, the passion for animals cannot be taught, but the ability to provide excellent technology-based medical care can be. Expanding your practice with diverse thoughts and experiences can help attract top talent and enhance your team's ability to connect and communicate with clients on a deeper level. Including team members in the growth and direction of the practice leads to a sense of belonging that will make them want to stay. A deep love and respect for new technology creates a climate in which team members continuously innovate because their ideas are used and appreciated. In my experience, teams that feel included and connected to the growth of the practice are more inclined to stay because they have worked together to build and mature their own careers as well as the practice.

By embracing diversity, inclusivity, and technology, you'll have the keys to building and retaining the veterinary team of the future. ■

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# Language Is Power

Making Stronger Connections  
Through Clients' Primary Language

BY ROXANNE HAWN

**C**lient communication already poses plenty of challenges between people who share a common language.

Connecting with clients for whom spoken English isn't their primary language is difficult—sometimes even perilous—owing to miscommunication over diagnoses, treatment options, risks, and costs.

In addition to affecting patient care and outcomes, language barriers also limit access to veterinary care. The 2018 Access to Veterinary Care Coalition's report surveyed pet owners and found that one of several reasons people failed to get veterinary care was "could not find provider who spoke my language."

Veterinary equity includes both access to care and equality in lived experiences.

"Language isn't just about talking. Language is also social and cultural interactions."

Kyra Munz, MSW, HAEI

"Language isn't just about talking. Language is also social and cultural interactions," said Kyra Munz, MSW, HAEI, at Foothills Animal Shelter in Golden, Colorado. "It's also crucial that our patrons get a full understanding of the services that we're trying to provide for their animals. Also, just in a customer service level, making sure everyone can have that same level of experience and feel seen

and heard in that interaction."

In making recommendations to improve access to veterinary care, the coalition included offering services in the pet owner's native or primary language. The report's authors added, "Being able to communicate effectively is essential for sharing complex information about pet health issues. Having a veterinarian or veterinary technician who is fluent in at least Spanish is optimal. However, it is important to know the community because there are more languages out there than just Spanish."

For example, in Florida, where Donita McCants, DVM, practices, there's a sizeable Brazilian population that speaks Portuguese. For a while, McCants worked with a Spanish-speaking veterinary assistant. Even then she says, "We just had to make sure we're not overwhelming the people who are Spanish speakers because they sometimes get overwhelmed when they have everyone kind of coming at them."

McCants knows her Spanish-speaking skills atrophied from lack of use after high school and college graduation. "I can kind of pull out enough of the conversation to figure out what they're asking, but communicating back would be probably really hard for me," she says.



## Growing Demand for Spanish

US Census data projections estimate Hispanic populations (of which not all—but many—members speak Spanish) to continue to grow over the next few decades. The projections say growth will reach:

- 21% (74.8 million) by 2030
- 24% (87.8 million) by 2040
- 26% (99.8 million) by 2050
- 28% (111.2 million) by 2060

Yet a 2015 survey of veterinary professionals in 10 states with large, established or fast-growing Spanish-speaking populations, found just 9.6% of veterinarians, 12.1% of credentialed veterinary technicians, and 6.9% of veterinary assistants spoke Spanish.

There's still time to prepare or catch up.

## Client Communication in Spanish

Right before pandemic lockdowns, Mandala Hunter-Ishikawa, DVM, moved to Colombia. Japanese is her first language, but she grew up speaking English too. Throughout her veterinary career with small animals, large animals, and wildlife around the world, Hunter-Ishikawa learned Chinese, Vietnamese, Amharic (Ethiopia), and a little bit of Malagasy while in Africa as well. Colombia, though, is her first Spanish-speaking locale.

In addition to her work with an NGO called Animals Asia, Hunter-Ishikawa cocreated a RACE-certified language course called “Spanish for Veterinary Professionals” with her husband, Peter Devia, a career languages educator who speaks at least six languages fluently. He grew up bilingual in Spanish and English.

Hunter-Ishikawa's quest to learn Spanish as quickly as

# Best Practices for Adding Language Support



### Start with a question

Rather than make assumptions based on someone's looks or name, ask if the client wants you to use another language you can speak.



### Allow extra time

Tyler Primavera, DVM, cofounder of Vetspacito, says, “I'm the type of person who doesn't mind being late to my next appointment, if it means explaining things better to my previous appointment. The best practice is that once the vet leaves the exam room, they should feel confident that they did their best job, whatever that means.”



### Provide signage / printed materials

Post signage and use forms and other printed materials in predominant languages in your community.



### Hire & compensate for language skills

In your hiring efforts, find, compensate, and schedule for better language coverage with your team. Often, team members with second language skills carry the translation burden during work hours and even when at home without extra payment, which isn't fair.



### Pay for on-demand translation

Human medicine also struggles with language challenges, so there are companies that specialize in providing phone or video on-demand translation for medical situations in more than 240 languages and more than 20,000 on-demand interpreters. In addition to subscription-type pricing, LanguageLine Solutions even offers no-contract, pay-per-minute services (\$3.95 via phone, \$4.95 via video) through its app.

possible taking online classes and using language acquisition apps uncovered the gaps in language learning. “My motivation was high, and yet the programs I’d signed up for were subpar to me as a professional, as a veterinarian, but even as a higher-level learner,” she says. “That’s when my husband said, ‘Let me make a program for you—for somebody else to teach because we all know that spouses shouldn’t teach each other.’”

Creating Spanish courses for veterinary professionals became their pandemic project. She provided the veterinary content. He structured the courses taught by native Spanish speakers. Each 10-hour module focuses on targeted veterinary vocabulary such as first consultation, diagnostic/treatment conversations, prescriptions and home care instructions, and wrapping things up, including financial conversations.

Students can work with remote

instructors either one-on-one, or with team members or friends. “We usually say that twice weekly is the best for language retention,” Hunter-Ishikawa says, “but if you can’t make it twice a week, that’s fine. We’ll work with you.”

The Spanish for Veterinary Professionals team also offers classes with specialized vocabulary for spay/neuter clinics and emergency care as well as some equine and exotic bird courses.

In her work in China, Hunter-Ishikawa remembers the frustration in clinical settings, even with onsite translators. “You really don’t know if the person receiving the information, even through translators, is getting what you’re trying to give them—with the compassion and tone that I want to share,” she says.

It’s a challenge, for sure. Tyler Primavera, DVM, once spent three to five minutes explaining neutering a puppy to a 12-year-old who translated for his dad. That

translation consisted of what sounded like one sentence, and the dad declined. “Who knows what he said, right?” Primavera asks. “Probably like it costs \$300, so the dad said no.” In addition, the stress and potentially mature topics and emotional burden makes relying on kids as translators not ideal.

That situation, among other things, led to Primavera cofounding Vetspacito. The company started with a subscription model of language support resources, including videos done in Spanish to explain common veterinary scenarios. Now, however, Vetspacito makes that content available free on YouTube. Look for a fresh iteration of the company’s training programs in the future.

Emily Singler, VMD, AAHA’s veterinary content specialist, speaks fluent Spanish, but she pursued total immersion via travel and international living on top of Spanish courses in high school and college. “At first, I felt like I couldn’t speak fast enough. I couldn’t string sentences together. I couldn’t understand everything they were saying because they were speaking too quickly,” she says.

Joking that she’s from the compact disc music generation, Singler credits listening to Spanish-language music over and over while reading the printed lyrics from the CD inserts to start speaking faster and sounding more natural. “My first husband, when he was trying to learn English,” she says, “used to listen to National Public Radio a lot because he said they spoke slowly enough and clearly enough that he could understand what they were saying, but for me it was a lot of music. I listened to a lot of Marc Anthony and salsa music.”

## Gamification for the Win?

Many online and app learning platforms tout gamification as a fast-track to learning. This quote from renowned developmental psychologist Karen Purvis often gets cited: “Scientists have determined that it takes approximately 400 repetitions to create a new synapse in the brain—unless it is done with play, in which case, it takes between 10 and 20 repetitions.”

A systematic review of gamification language learning published in 2021 concluded with the following: “Vocabulary and grammar were the most important basic language skills that reported in the reviewed articles. However, such studies in the literature, especially on pronunciation skills, are still scarce ... Even though different game elements have been used for LFL, there was no clear trend as to which types of game elements might be more appropriate for which aspects of learning processes and basic language skills and advantages.”



Singler also watched some telenovelas and took a few veterinary volunteer service trips while in veterinary school, where she helped translate for veterinarians. “I was still pretty early on in vet school, so I didn’t get to do surgery or anything,” she recalls. “. . . I got to be the one to do [translations between veterinarians and pet owners], and that was just so reinforcing for me that someone benefited from that skill that I had, even though I felt like I was still very much working on it.”

### Not Just Spoken Languages

In Colorado, Munz says, “I would say the second most common language we see is American Sign Language (ASL), and I think that’s a language that gets overlooked because it’s not a verbal language.”

Maggie Marton, author of the forthcoming book *For the Love of*

*Dog* (February 2025) and a hearing person who parents a deaf/hard of hearing (D/HH) child and now also a bilaterally deaf and unilaterally blind dog, learned a lot from deaf community mentors

and teachers. She says, “Many D/HH adults appreciate any efforts to communicate—including writing things down, using an app like Large Text, or even gestures—rather than the burden

“Many deaf/hard of hearing adults appreciate any efforts to communicate—including writing things down, using an app like Large Text, or even gestures—rather than the burden of lip reading or voicing be placed on them.”

Maggie Marton, author

Whether you trot out Google Translate, compete with colleagues and friends using popular language learning apps, actively hire multilingual team members, or prioritize language education in your staff development plans, simply trying to improve your communication in other languages makes an impact that people appreciate.

of lip reading or voicing be placed on them.”

Dayna Balinski, CVT (IL), RVT (IN), works for Emergency Veterinary Care Centers in Highland, Illinois. She is deaf and explains that coworkers get her attention by waiving their hands and switching the lights on/off. “Sometimes they throw things at me,” she laughs via emoji. Her advice for communicating with D/HH clients includes using gestures and making sure you look at them and that they are looking at you when you speak. Also, she says, “Talk slowly if possible, but don’t exaggerate your words.”

### A for Effort

Whether you trot out Google Translate, compete with colleagues and friends using popular language learning apps, actively hire multilingual team members,

or prioritize language education in your staff development plans, simply trying to improve your communication in other languages makes an impact that people appreciate. Veterinary teams might even consider asking multilingual clients to help role play common scenarios.

Fluency absolutely elevates client service and veterinary care for pets. Singler says, “All of a sudden, you can see their shoulders drop and the look on their faces changes because they realize they don’t have to keep struggling and working so hard to get their point across. Suddenly,

they can be comfortable and just talk. That can change the whole mood of the appointment.”

### Just One Caution

Considerable research into additional language acquisition describes something called a “moral foreign language effect.” Basically, this means that making difficult decisions in another language blunts emotions and increases focus on outcomes. It’s important for veterinary teams to recognize this in themselves and in clients. Know that you may sound less compassionate, and don’t assume a flatter emotional response indicates a client’s lack of feeling or connection to the veterinary patient. ■

## Streaming Content and Subtitles

When Reddit users debate the best language learning apps, commenters often tout YouTube as a free way to work on new language skills by watching videos with subtitles. Others watch foreign language content from other paid streaming services also with subtitles. It helps to see the language while hearing it.

# Ready to Publish?

Want to submit your small animal medicine manuscript to a popular and well-respected scientific journal but don't want to wait a year or more before publication? Now is the time to do it! The American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) is actively seeking submissions for its bimonthly, peer-reviewed publication, the *Journal of the American Animal Hospital Association (JAAHA)*.

All submissions go through a peer-review process and are carefully evaluated by the *JAAHA* section editors, a team of top-tier specialists in a wide variety of fields from oncology to soft tissue surgery. Reviewers and editors will make every effort to expeditiously review manuscripts and move them through the publication process as quickly as possible.



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- Review articles
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- Case reports

If you're ready to begin your journey to publication, head over to [jaaha.org](http://jaaha.org) and click on "Submit" to get started.

[jaaha.org](http://jaaha.org)



CULTURE IN PRACTICE/ **PROFESSIONAL APPEARANCES**

# The New Professional Attire

Practices Across the Country Prefer a Clean and Relaxed Look

BY LAVANYA SUNKARA

**A**n environment where individuals can bring their authentic selves is at the core of an inclusive and welcoming workspace. For some, that authenticity is expressed through the clothes they wear, or through their tattoos and piercings. That's no different in veterinary medicine, where a growing number of professionals are preferring surgical scrubs to white coats or business attire, and practices are welcoming (and even embracing) artistic body expressions in their employees.

The image of someone dressed in a crisp, white coat with no visible tattoos or piercings still comes to mind when many

people think of a veterinarian, but perceptions are changing. According to a study published in *Veterinary Journal* by researchers at the University of Wisconsin (UW) School of Veterinary Medicine, titled "Effect of attire on client perceptions of veterinarians," participants found veterinarians dressed in a white lab coat more competent than those in surgical scrubs or business-casual attire. Participants, however, also preferred those in surgical scrubs with no white lab coat to those simply wearing business attire. The survey included 505 clients (the majority of whom were female) who bring their pets to an academic specialty hospital in an urban area.

The attire of veterinarians remains a form of nonverbal communication that impacts clients' perceptions. A pet owner study in Canada by researchers at Ontario Veterinary College (OVC) at the University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada, concluded that attire influences a client's trust and comfort with a veterinarian. Among the 449 participants—who were overwhelmingly female and college-plus educated, 71% believed attire was important in building trust and confidence. The study recommends that veterinary personnel and management consider how their appearance represents staff members and their practice.



### White Coat and Business Attire Versus Medical Scrubs

Both the UW and OVC studies indicated that clients trusted the medical knowledge of vets wearing surgical scrubs, and felt more comfortable around them, compared with vets in business attire. In the OVC study, faith and confidence were lower toward veterinarians wearing a t-shirt and jeans, and comfort levels were lowest around those vets wearing formal business attire.

Brianne Miers, a resident of Easton, Pennsylvania, recently took her dog to a clinic where she saw two male vets dressed in button-down shirts and dress pants. “I thought they were almost

overdressed given that they’re crouched down on the floor being slobbered and jumped on!” she recalls.

Some research has shown that animals do not respond as positively to the harsh white color of a lab coat. A study by the Department of Veterinary Clinical Sciences at Washington State University College of Veterinary Medicine looked into whether dogs would choose a food reward from a veterinarian wearing a white coat or one not wearing the coat. They found that the dogs spent more time with their owners and those vets not wearing a white coat. The study, “Dogs’ Preference for White Coat versus No White Coat

↑ Technicians, veterinarians, and virtual staff wear different color scrubs at Modern Animal, based in Culver City, California. Staff are also free to express themselves through body autonomy including piercings and tattoos.

When Offered a Food Reward in the Exam Room,” published in the *Open Access Journal of Veterinary Science and Research*, concluded that the white coat was a stressor for the canines.

“I want to feel like my vet and I are on the same team for my pet’s health, and their being in scrubs



“As long as a person is showered, well groomed, and dressed appropriately, all other visual aesthetics are immaterial to how they perform their duties.”

Anthony Hall, DVM, MPH, Northwest Animal Hospital

makes me feel that way, more than them being in a white coat,” said Tori Williams, a Colorado-based pet owner.

Scrubs, which are designed for function and comfort in a medical setting, are seen as more casual but still professional. They also convey a sense of familiarity, which pet owners want when visiting the animal hospital. Veterinary technicians are almost always seen in scrubs, as they more frequently come in contact with the animals. But some practices have all staff members wear scrubs, including veterinarians.

Business attire is a holdover from an older generation, says Anthony Hall, DVM, MPH, at Northwest Animal Hospital in Dallas, Texas. “No one here wears white coats,” he says of his clinic. The practice has four doctors, all of whom wear scrubs, except for the practice owner (the oldest of

the four), who dons slacks, a dress shirt, a tie, and dress shoes.

At Hall’s practice, staff are welcome to purchase their own scrubs. “As long as they are navy blue, we let the team members choose which brand and style of scrubs, allowing them to be the most comfortable at work.” Hall prefers to wear athletic scrubs made from the same material as workout attire. Though they tend to be expensive, they are lightweight, form-fitting, moisture-wicking and, best of all, comfortable. Other staff members opt for more traditional cotton scrubs.

### Uniforms and Branded Attire

Modern scrubs are no longer shapeless and boring. Many veterinary professionals are opting for flattering, well-fitting medical scrubs that exude a polished and professional look. Some practices go so far as to have the practice’s name or their logo and the employee’s name embroidered on them, which can help establish a practice’s brand recognition and trust.

“Our clientele judge our knowledge and capabilities by our appearance. Wearing a

← Anthony Hall, DVM, MPH, at Northwest Animal Hospital in Dallas, Texas, prefers to don athletic wear-style scrubs in his practice. “No one here wears white coats,” Hall said.

professional and clean uniform can help us establish their trust,” says Ashley Larson, practice manager at PetVet365, a Fear Free clinic in Westminster, Colorado. Staff members wear navy blue scrubs with their names embroidered, as that helps clients know who they are talking to.

Christie Long, DVM, chief medical officer at Modern Animal, based in Culver City, California, says they strive to create a very intentional brand experience for their staff. Team members wear scrubs that are both comfortable and stylish, branded with the practice’s “M” logo on the upper left.

“We wanted our teams to feel like their clothes are stain-resistant, breathable, and durable,” Long said. Staff can also be identifiable by the color of their scrubs: Doctors wear charcoal, technicians wear ceil

blue, and virtual care members wear dark blue scrubs. They receive an annual “scrub allowance” to purchase two new sets from the practice’s online store. For added comfort, staff can also choose from several Modern Animal–branded item styles, including a zip-up hoodie and pullover sweatshirt.

Branded medical scrubs are also the norm at Veterinary Emergency Group (VEG), where staff, fondly called VEGgies, wear charcoal gray scrubs with VEG branding. This sends a clear message to clients.

“It’s clear we’re a cohesive team working toward the same mission of helping people and their pets when they need it most,” says Anna Foster, VEG chief of staff.

More than half of the participants in the OVC study believed that healthcare professionals should wear a name tag when interacting with

clients and patients. It’s crucial for VEGgies to always have their name visible to their clients, Foster said, so clients can personally thank them.

The ID is also essential for VEG because the locations feature an open-concept emergency room (ER) setting, where multiple families are in one area at any given time. Clear staff IDs allow clients to know who a VEGgie is easily. The staff also has the option to wear a VEG jacket or vest to add another layer of self-expression.

Although branded apparel has advantages, it’s not always

↓ At PetVet365, a Fear Free clinic in Westminster, Colorado, staff members wear navy blue scrubs with their names embroidered on them. Almost all staff members have a tattoo or piercing.

Photo courtesy of PetVet365





↑ Staff at Veterinary Emergency Group in Florida sport personalized gray scrubs branded with the practice logo.

necessary, especially for smaller clinics. Hall, of Northwest Animal Hospital, said he doesn't believe it makes too much of a difference to have branded attire, other than the added cost of embroidering.

"Our practice brings in seven figures in revenue annually, so we are doing pretty good without a logo on our clothes," Hall said.

In larger practices, however, clients don't always see the same

veterinarian or technician, so IDs can help clients remember their names for a more personal experience.

### Emergency Room Attire

According to a study published in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, a survey of 154 clients of a small animal emergency clinic in a rural location over a month showed that clients didn't have a preference for how a veterinarian was dressed in the emergency room. When their pet is in the ER, most people generally just want to receive help—how their doctor dresses isn't even considered. However, most of the participants in the study said they did not want

their veterinarians to wear ties or white coats.

Williams wants to see the white coat even less in the emergency room. "I can't imagine an ER vet being able to keep it clean when such critical cases are coming in," she said.

At VEG, Foster says scrubs allow staff to do their jobs best. "It's like a superhero putting on their cape," she says. "ER can get messy, it's long hours, and there's lots of shuffling around. VEGgies need uniforms that allow them to perform their job functions well and be comfortable."

### Piercings and Tattoos

"I don't mind at all if vets or vet techs have visible tattoos and/



“Our clientele judge our knowledge and capabilities by our appearance. Wearing a professional and clean uniform can help us establish their trust.”

Ashley Larson, Practice Manager, PetVet365

or piercings—as long as my dog is happy, I’m happy,” says Miers. That’s the consensus among pet owners who were interviewed for this article. Workplaces are safe spaces where individuals can be themselves without repercussions from their employers or clients. “I prefer to support businesses allowing employees to express themselves and be who they are. I assume it’s a good workplace, and employees are happy there,” adds Miers.

Veterinary practices such as Northwest Animal Hospital, Modern Animal, VEG, and PetVet 365 welcome body autonomy and encourage staff to express their individuality. “Almost all of our team members have tattoos and piercings,” says PetVet365’s Larson. At Hall’s Texas practice, many staff

have tattoos, visible piercings, and hair dyed in various colors. “Function is valued over fashion,” Hall states. “As long as a person is showered, well groomed, and dressed appropriately, all other visual aesthetics are immaterial to how they perform their duties.”

At Modern Animal, Long says that they do not restrict this form of expression “as long as neither distracts from their ability to perform their jobs.” The practice did a special recurring feature on Instagram called “Scatched,” featuring members of their Care Team telling stories behind their tattoos. “We are empathic by nature . . . and I believe this is just an external expression of a lot of the things we feel inside,” reads one of the Instagram posts. Modern Animal Culver City’s lead doctor, Tony Nitido, DVM, has a tattoo sleeve depicting imagery that is important to him including different animals, important dates in his life, and Asclepius, the Greek god of medicine. “They make me feel more confident about myself; they make me feel good,” he said of his tattoos.

Although tattoo and piercing culture is increasingly acceptable in the work setting, some considerations must be

taken into account concerning body modifications. Some piercings could present a risk of injury if a patient were to get caught on it or accidentally tear it out. With tattoos, thought must be given to how other team members or clients could view specific imagery.

Cheyenne Rowell, a pet owner in Arizona, says she mostly doesn’t mind piercings or tattoos as she and her husband both have them, but if someone has body art that could be perceived as racist, she would be concerned as she has biracial children. “I would not want treatment to be different for my pet because they don’t like my family’s race,” she said. “I understand that some people may have changed from their past, but tattoos can be removed, covered, or altered to represent their new beliefs.”

“If we felt a tattoo would be offensive to another team member or a client, we would ask them to cover it up by wearing long sleeves under their scrubs,” says Larson. It’s important to discuss these hard things, even if they are uncomfortable, she said. “Luckily, we have not had any offensive tattoos or piercings so far.” ■



MONEY MATTERS / **CLIENT PAYMENT OPTIONS**

# More Options Equals Better Care

Ease Client Financial Stress and Boost Your Wellbeing

BY MAUREEN BLANEY FLIETNER

MachineHeadz/iStock via Getty Images Plus

// Early in my career, I would often be annoyed about the financial struggles of pet owners and would say that if people couldn't pay for a pet's need, they shouldn't have a pet," admitted Ryan Frazier, BS, LVT, a certified career coach in Seattle, Washington.

Frazier now says that if he did not currently work in the veterinary medicine field, he doesn't know if he could afford the care his pets need.

"I now sympathize with these owners," Frazier said. "It is our job to provide the top standard of care and go from there. If pet owners can't afford the care, then we need to work with the owner to figure out what they can afford. That is our job. Not everyone can afford the top standard and every test to get a diagnosis, but we can still help the pet."

Frazier's comments express an idea that others in the veterinary community seem to be arriving at, especially as they see client financial struggles affect their own wellbeing and that of their colleagues.

"The relationship between clients and veterinarians where financial constraints exist is always so difficult on both sides. When clients face economic challenges, they may postpone or decline necessary treatments for their animals, presenting ethical dilemmas for veterinary professionals," explained Erin Wasson, MSW, RSW, a social worker at the University of Saskatchewan, Canada. "This financial constraint not only impacts the animals' wellbeing but also places emotional and ethical burdens on the veterinary team as they strive to balance compassionate care, economic realities, and animal welfare."

## "Dealing with the financial stress of a client is really hard on our team . . ."

Amy Hantschel, DVM, Racine  
Veterinary Hospital, Racine, WI

In addition, she said, "when veterinarians set appropriate boundaries around what they can do for clients based on financial constraints, they are often on the receiving end of public ire, with some cases of clients taking to social media to attack the character of a veterinarian. These responses are extremely damaging to the wellbeing of many veterinarians who are already struggling with the internal value conflict of being a trained caregiver and also needing to be able to keep their lights on."

What options might hospitals want to check out? CareCredit and ScratchPay as well as pet insurance are popular offerings, but some clients might not qualify or be able to afford payments. Here's a look at some alternatives.

### **American Veterinary Medical Foundation (AVMF) Reaching Every Animal with Charitable Healthcare (REACH) Program**

Amy Hantschel, DVM, of Racine Veterinary Hospital in Racine, Wisconsin, described one challenging situation she encountered with a client. The pet owner had just seen the successful conclusion of a nearly two-month-long struggle with her eight-year-old collie's health. Then her cat, Loki, broke his femoral head.

"While you can plan for emergencies to some degree, it's near impossible to handle when multiple pets are in need of extensive medical procedures," said Hantschel.

The owner absolutely could not afford the surgery, explained Hantschel. It was only through the AVMF REACH program and the hospital's charitable contributions that Loki had successful surgery.

Hantschel, who said the hospital started using REACH in July 2023, said they are thankful they have a program in place where, at their discretion, they can provide some degree of treatment and diagnostics at a discount to owners in financial need.

"We got into this field because we really care for animals and the people attached to them, so it is certainly emotionally exhausting when there is an animal that could have been saved if money were no object," she said.

"I expect that REACH will be of great benefit to patients moving forward. It's very helpful to have that cushion for people that need financial relief. Dealing with the financial stress of a client is really hard on our team because they understand more than anyone that the cost can easily prohibit pets from getting the care they should."

According to Michael San

Filippo, AVMA Senior Media Relations Manager, AVMF REACH offers grants to its more than 105,000 AVMA members nationwide. The program officially launched in spring 2023, and \$72,000 was paid out that year. The AVMA invites donations to the AVMF REACH Program.

AVMA member veterinarians may apply for a REACH grant through its online grant application. Each member may request up to \$2,000 per case, not to exceed \$2,000 per calendar year, to assist owners facing financial hardship. Members within the same practice may even pool their funds to help a single case. Grants are provided as reimbursement for veterinary charitable care services that have already been provided.

### **Paisley Paws Charitable Veterinary Foundation**

Since FloridaWild Integrative Veterinary Center and Urgent Care of DeLand, Florida, connected with Paisley Paws in May 2022, the practice has received financial help for several cases, explained Kerry Wagoner, CVT, hospital director.

One case involved a cat named KeKe. After being hospitalized and cleared of his third urinary blockage, he blocked for the fourth time a few weeks later. The owner had done everything recommended but had exhausted her funds from the previous procedures and hospitalizations.

With the help of funds raised and the 20% matching donation of Paisley Paws, much of the surgery bill could be paid. Without the funds, he would have been euthanized, said Wagoner.

“For our team, nothing is more heartbreaking than explaining to a family that their beloved

pet will not survive without the emergency services they need but cannot afford.

“As doctors and nurses, we take an oath to do no harm. Having to euthanize or watch animals suffer over finances leaves the entire team feeling like we’ve failed our patients and our clients—a guilt that we take home with us,” she said.

“Paisley Paws has completely changed how we function as a hospital, allowing us to focus more on saving patients and less on finances. Working with the foundation has been a breath of fresh air.”

Paisley Paws was founded by Brian Hamm, DVM, who wanted to positively impact the veterinary landscape after the loss of seven veterinary colleagues to suicide, according to Andrea McKown, foundation executive director.

The foundation has three

main pillars. Its “life-saving, life-enhancing” financial support for owners of pets with a medical crisis is already in operation. Its other two pillars—financial support for senior-level veterinary students and financial support to address the emotional and mental burdens of veterinarians—are in the works.

Paisley Paws, which officially launched in October 2022, has welcomed 133 “PAWrtner” hospitals across 29 states, according to McKown. Since January 2023, it has contributed more than \$67,000 to help 113 pets as of the end of February 2024.

Among the rules for receiving Paisley Paws aid, hospitals must become a PAWrtner, raise funds locally, and have a client who pays a minimum of 10% of the total cost of veterinary care. Paisley Paws provides a 20% match to all donations made directly to a clinic’s fund, up to \$25,000.



SeventyFour/Stock via Getty Images Plus

“(VetBilling) has allowed our team to utilize their skills to their fullest extent as we can find a way to pay for care that did not exist for many clients in the past.”

CARRIE BOWGREN, PRACTICE MANAGER, LAKE ROAD ANIMAL HOSPITAL, HORSEHEADS, N.Y.

### **VetBilling.com**

Carrie Bowgren, Practice Manager at Lake Road Animal Hospital, Horseheads, New York, said her clinic wanted to practice “gold-standard” medicine but many of their clients could not afford that level of care. Instead doctors had to amend treatment plans to fit clients’ budgets rather than provide the most positive patient outcomes.

“This style of practice leads to immense frustration within

veterinary teams,” said Bowgren. “Knowing that a patient can be helped but being forced to offer lesser care or even euthanasia because the client cannot afford more is, in my mind, a primary reason that veterinarians leave practice.”

With many people’s mental health dependent upon their ability to share their lives with a pet, she said, “it would be catastrophic to our society to only allow those with financial means to have pets. So

many who work in the veterinary industry are but a single paycheck away from financial ruin and could not afford to have a pet if they were not afforded steep discounts by their employers.”

Bowgren said she tried several possible solutions for their clients before she discovered VetBilling.com in 2017. But the practice owner, Dr. Michael Brennen, and she were so concerned that the hospital would not receive payment in full, they tightened up on its use—which meant they effectively did not use the solution, she explained.

Finally in 2019, the hospital decided to try VetBilling to boost dental compliance. Clients got a payment options chart and were urged to pick one they preferred.

“We increased dental revenue by 30% for July–December 2019 over July–December 2018,” she noted. “The even more stunning aspect was that most clients paid in full at time of service, not utilizing any of the suggested payment options. Apparently just knowing that an option existed was enough to prompt clients to accept recommendations.”

Over the past three years, the hospital has opened the use of VetBilling to all clients. There are no restrictions, even for clients with failing credit scores. Their success rate, as of the end of





February 2024, is 94.4%. The practice, she said, is financially healthier because of VetBilling.

But more importantly, she said, is that the practice “embodies a culture of ‘How can we help?’ This has positively impacted our ability to attract new clients and keep existing clients. It has allowed our team to utilize their skills to their fullest extent as we can find a way to pay for care that did not exist for many clients in the past. No one on our team ever utters ‘they shouldn’t have a pet because they cannot afford care.’ We feel we are able to do what we came to do—help animals.”

VetBilling, which partners with about 1,200 hospitals across the United States, was cofounded in 2013 by Tony Ferraro and Suzanne

Cannon. Cannon said she had experienced her own financial challenges with emergency veterinary care in the past.

The organization offers a two-tier monthly support plan. Pet owners pay a one-time nonrefundable fee of \$25 to activate the payment plan and a flat \$3 fee is added to each recurring payment until the balance is paid.

“Our overall success rate across all plans is above 90%, which is important because veterinarians tend to assume that anything called a ‘payment plan’ will have a high failure rate and that isn’t accurate,” explained Cannon.

“These clinics are willing to accept a minor degree of risk of default in exchange for the ability to treat more animals in need

of care; enhance the wellbeing of their staff by empowering them to say ‘yes’ rather than ‘no;’ build goodwill among their client base and community; and practice relationship-centered, contextualized care that allows them to meet the pet owner where they are during the most stressful moments of pet guardianship—illness, injury, or emergency.”

### **Open Door Veterinary Collective**

Over the past years, studies have reported on the increasing cost of veterinary care and increasing burnout of veterinarians and staff who are ultimately leaving the profession. Subsequently, there has been more interest in how to provide affordable care without



“We often talk about ‘cost,’  
but the actual barrier is  
often a lack of financing  
options for paying the cost.”

Aimee St. Arnaud, founder of Open Door  
Veterinary Collective

having to give away services but without many viable solutions, explained Elizabeth Alvarez, DVM, DABVP, clinical assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin College of Veterinary Medicine in Madison, Wisconsin.

Enter the Open Door Veterinary Collective. Alvarez said she took its training level 1 online course and found that it introduced her “to strategies and action steps—most of which are simple to implement—to begin to not only reframe the way the entire clinic perceives financially fragile clients, but also how to clearly take the steps to create a ‘financially friendly’ clinic. The training was interesting and engaging for not only DVMs but all members of the veterinary team.”

The Madison school is now one of 10 piloting the Opening the Door to Veterinary Care online curriculum. It will offer it through its elective Access to Care, One Health WisCARES clinic rotation, said Alvarez.

The goal is to get the program in all schools at no cost to them, according to Aimee St. Arnaud, founder of Open Door. The 501(c)(3) nonprofit has focused on increasing access to veterinary care through one-on-one consulting, online learning courses, pethelpfinder.org (a locator of financially friendly pet resources), research, and collaborative partnerships.

“This is why we chose the name ‘collective’—because we believe in the importance of working together to bring forth innovative solutions,” said St. Arnaud. “We often talk about ‘cost,’ but the actual barrier is often a lack of financing options for paying the cost,” she said. That leaves staff with noncompliance fatigue and leads to moral distress.

St. Arnaud also is a partner in two for-profit veterinary hospitals—Community Pet Care Clinic in Toledo, Ohio, and Open Door Veterinary Care in Asheville, North Carolina—that model

the concepts of increased care without giving away or deeply discounting services.

Ideas piloted at the two for-profit hospitals show the model can be successful, she said—an important step in the group’s goal of creating a national network of for-profit and nonprofit practices increasing access to care.

St. Arnaud explained that those hospitals demonstrated that practices with their access-to-care focus could have a net profit of 5–10% with one veterinarian and 10–20% with two to three veterinarians. This includes three medical support staff per veterinarian and 30-minute appointments.

Open Door has created the first online, self-paced Access to Care certificate with six RACE and CVPM hours. It is negotiating to get on a large continuing education platform and then will market nationwide.

“It’s important now more than ever that practices start thinking about how to address the growing concern of cost of care,” said St. Arnaud. “More clients are delaying or declining care and that can cause moral distress among veterinary teams. Practices that focus on this now will be set up for success in the future.” ■

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PODCAST / WELLNESS INSIGHTS

# Wellness Insights for Vet Med Professionals and Beyond

A Conversation with Courtney A. Campbell,  
DVM, DACVS (Small Animal)

INTERVIEW BY KATIE BERLIN, DVM

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In this excerpt from *Central Line: The AAHA Podcast*, host Katie Berlin, DVM, talks with Courtney A. Campbell, DVM, DACVS (Small Animal), a veterinary surgeon and media personality. Together, they explore the intersection of veterinary medicine and mental wellness and the benefits of staying physically active away from work.

The conversation covers a range of topics, from the significance of human-animal bonds to the diverse ways individuals can contribute to veterinary medicine and find purpose. Campbell shares personal experiences, emphasizing the importance of aligning one's "how" with their unique personality and values. Touching on themes of gratitude and vulnerability, this episode provides a refreshing perspective on our professional lives and the ongoing pursuit of wellness.

You can follow along on Campbell's journey by following him on Instagram (@drcourtneydvm) and visiting his website: [drcourtneydvm.com](http://drcourtneydvm.com).

**Katie Berlin:** Dr. Courtney Campbell, I have wanted to meet

you for a long time. I see you on social media all the time, but we have never actually met, like shook hands, until about an hour ago.

**Courtney Campbell:** We've never spoken in person, but yet still we're friends. It's always funny when people ask you, "So how long have you guys known each other?" And you're like, "Oh, I just met them five minutes ago." They're like, "How is that possible?"

**KB:** I feel like that's one of the best things about getting older—you really know your people when you meet them. You know if they're gonna be somebody that you click with or somebody that you just don't really have all that much to say to. That doesn't happen often in this community though.

**CC:** It doesn't because we know that there is a commonality. So that's why—I'm not just saying this because there's a microphone in front of my face—but I'm so privileged and grateful to meet you.

**KB:** Same, yeah.

**CC:** As I get older, what I'm realizing is how precious your

time is. When you're super young, you think a lot about finances because you don't have much; you're a student and you're just scraping by. I'm not going to say that's not important as we get older, but you realize just how important people, time, and relationships are.

The lived experiences and relationships that you've had are so critical to contextualize the relationships you're having now. If you've had a negative experience, you can consider it an investment, and the return on that investment is meeting an outstanding person. Because as you're meeting that outstanding person, not only are you recognizing them for being so awesome and for being so cool, you're also recognizing them in context to the some of the people you met who haven't been so cool.

**KB:** That's true. Everything's relative, and by the time we get to be adults, there's a history.

**CC:** Yes. That history helps us get acquainted, and it's important to get upfront and close to that history. Think about ways that we could have improved as a person; think about ways we could have

The lived experiences and relationships that you've had are so critical to contextualize the relationships you're having now. If you've had a negative experience, you can consider it an investment, and the return on that investment is meeting an outstanding person.

Courtney A. Campbell, DVM, DACVS (Small Animal)

improved that interaction. As we get close and intimate with that history, then the rewards of that are these tremendously gratifying experiences with great people. In my humble opinion, you can't have those gratifying experiences without being super acquainted with your history. And it's tough sometimes; sometimes, the toughest experiences are where we learn the most.

**KB:** Yes. And you learn it as you go, but you don't realize it till later. Sometimes with therapy.

**CC:** Right, right. Lots and lots of therapy. You know what's interesting? This is my opportunity to be vulnerable here. I have met so many people who have had therapy or are currently in therapy, and you can tell because the work that they've done on themselves is so self-evident. My admission here is that I don't currently have a therapist, and I haven't been to therapy, but I'm open to it. I would absolutely go to it. I haven't had time to find one. But everybody who I've met

who either has gone to therapy, you can tell because the work they've done on themselves has been tremendous.

**KB:** That's so true. And I don't think therapy's the answer for everyone. I took 44 years too long to go to therapy. But now I have a therapist and it's work, man. I get why people don't have time. It doesn't just take the hour appointment. It's not an hour that you can fit in between meetings or on your way to a 10-hour day at work. You don't just have your conversation and it's done. You have your conversation and your brain is thinking about it on the way up to the conversation. And then after the conversation, your brain is trying to process everything you talked about, and maybe you're sad or you dredged up stuff that you were like, I never wanted to think about that again in my whole life. It's very hard, and if it's fun, you're probably not going deep enough.

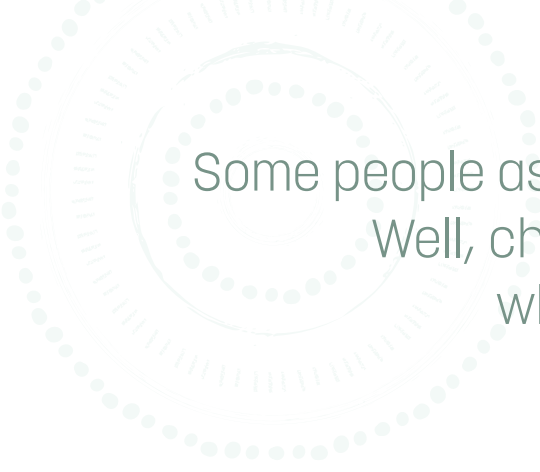
**CC:** Yeah, I get you. And there's analogies there a little bit to

exercise. Some people ask, "What's your favorite exercise to do?" Well, chances are, if it's your favorite that's not where you're having the biggest growth. If you're on the StairMaster and you're like, I love StairMaster, you're probably not going fast enough. You know what I'm saying?

**KB:** I do not love. Does anybody love the StairMaster?

**CC:** Nobody does. I'm not saying you need to hate it, but it certainly, there needs to be just a scintilla of discomfort there. I love what you said particularly about the fact that it can be hard. And here's why I love what you said, because the word mental health and mental wellness and mindfulness are certainly buzzworthy words, and they warrant their fair share of attention. But a lot of times we don't get a chance to talk about the nuances, the details, the nitty-gritty where the rubber meets the road about mental health. We say, "Hey, it's important." I agree 100%, but you are not going to find the best therapist right off the bat.





Some people ask, “what’s your favorite exercise to do?” Well, chances are, if it’s your favorite that’s not where you’re having the biggest growth. If you’re on the StairMaster and you’re like, I love StairMaster, you’re probably not going fast enough.

Courtney A. Campbell, DVM,  
DACVS (Small Animal)

Sometimes it works, sometimes it takes a few attempts.

It’s much easier just to say, “Yeah, mental wellness is important particularly in vet med;” but let’s talk about the details.

**KB:** And money. If you’re lucky enough to have insurance cover it, then my copay is \$45, I pay \$45 every two weeks to see a therapist. Is it worth it to me? Yes. Am I lucky enough to have \$45 every two weeks to spend on this therapy? Yes. And not everybody is. And so definitely it’s much more complicated than just saying everybody should have a therapist.

But everybody should have something that helps you get out of your head a little bit. I used to say running is my therapy. This is a big fat lie.

**CC:** Tell me why it’s not therapy.

**KB:** Running can help you solve problems, but it’s not showing you things that you might need to see. Sometimes you need somebody else with training to hold the mirror up for you.

**CC:** That’s such a great point.

**KB:** But it definitely does help with mental health for me, a hundred

percent. Running, the gym, yoga, all of that stuff, that’s really important to me.

Do you have like a third space where you don’t have to be Dr. Courtney Campbell? And you just, you don’t have responsibilities other than just to let yourself be there?

**CC:** I tend to engage in exercise that requires the maximal amount of mental focus. Endurance sports are fun, but they do allow for some thoughts about work life. Those sorts of things creep in while I’m trying to get through an endurance activity.

Now, if I’m sprinting uphill several times in interval training, I’m not thinking about anything else. You have to get your breath back before you collapse. Or if I’m trying to pick up something very heavy or press it off my shoulders— if it’s so heavy that I’m only thinking about the fact that I need to get this off of my body, otherwise my chest caves in—I’m not thinking about, well, Tommy said this to me yesterday at work. All I’m thinking about at that hour is that.

So high-intensity training—that’s what takes my mind off of

anything else.

I used to have a bunch of buddies who were veterinary technicians—shout out to veterinary technicians, just amazing—and every Sunday they used to be like, “Hey, Courtney, let’s meet in my garage and we’ll put on some boxing gloves and we’ll spar.”

For me, combat sports—boxing, wrestling, jiu-jitsu—also tend to do that. You aren’t thinking about anything else if you are in some sort of combat athletics. Whatever it is, if you are being punched, you’re not thinking, “Huh, I wonder what I’m going to do tomorrow?” No, you’re thinking, I have to defend myself. So shout out to anybody who does jiu-jitsu, wrestling, boxing, whatever it is—if you’re in some sort of combat sport, you know it takes 100% focus.

**KB:** You gotta be in the moment.

**CC:** You gotta be in the moment for sure. And I’m sure the cases with lower-impact sports like yoga, pilates, and stuff like that; do you currently do that or no?

**KB:** I do. I taught puppy yoga here.

**CC:** Wow.

**KB:** I mean, teaching puppy yoga, they're there for the puppies. But yoga is tough because the whole thing is being in the moment and trusting your body, but there's also nothing to distract you. You're not trying to run, push a rock up a hill, or pull a sled that weighs a bazillion pounds.

There's phases in life. I used to be in a pushing phase. I used to want to push, push, push and do HIIT classes and boot camps, and I used to teach P90X LIVE and I would be dead. But I don't want to do that right now; I'm in an allowing phase now.

**CC:** Talk to me about that allowing phase, yoga, and how animals are integrated. Because listen, there's going to be people who hear us right now and are like, "Okay, this goat yoga, cat yoga, dog yoga. What is all of that? That's a bunch of nonsense. Why are you integrating animals in yoga?" And to somebody who's uninitiated, like myself, break it down for me. I'm pro animals, but what's the point of integrating animals in yoga?

**KB:** I was a big skeptic of things like goat yoga for a long time. But I also didn't really love yoga. At that time, I was in a pushing phase where I was like, if there's goats there, what are you actually doing? You're playing with the goats. What if they climb on you when you're on the ground? They're real pointy. And as you were saying earlier, if you're smiling during a workout or if you really enjoy the StairMaster, you're probably not doing it quite hard enough. StairMaster is a building, pushing workout; it's not

a joy workout. You're doing it to build strength and muscle.

**CC:** Absolutely.

**KB:** But there are workouts that are just for joy. And I teach a dance fitness workout—that's joy. If you're worried about how many calories you're burning, you're not doing the workout. You might as well be on the StairMaster. But to do dance and to do yoga—those workouts are about joy and about saying, this is something my body can do and I'm celebrating it. And yes, maybe I want to get better at it, but you appreciate what your body can do during those workouts because at the end you feel joy. And I think that's what the animals have to do with it.

**CC:** Got it, got it.

**KB:** It's really hard not to feel joy when you're doing downward dog, you're upside down and there's a puppy sitting there. There was one guy—actually the AAHA-accredited practice of the year owner, shout out to Upper Arlington—and he was in the front row at puppy yoga. He went into child's pose at the end, which is where he was in a crouch position with his head down on the mat. And a puppy just came along and sat on it. It was the cutest thing. And then he couldn't get up until the puppy got up.

**CC:** Of course you're right. It's like those people who sleep on a corner of the bed because they don't want to disturb their dogs.

**KB:** Yes. That joy of just watching those puppies sort of cavort around while we were enjoying this beautiful morning on the roof, that to me is the essence of yoga.



**CC:** That is really cool. And here I thought the essence of yoga was the state of being comfortable in discomfort or the state of being comfortable in uncomfortable states. And you're saying, no, you can enjoy your workouts with joy. It makes sense.

**KB:** Generally speaking, any of those workouts that are about the joy of movement and connecting with your body, you could easily incorporate animals into those too.

**CC:** You know what's interesting too, and this is something that I noticed recently after I had a bike fall, is that sometimes the privilege of body movement is lost on you. Where you're like, I don't want to work out today. I don't want to do this today. Then all of a sudden, I fall off my bike, I have a bad sprained wrist and I can't pick up a kettlebell, I can't pick up a dumbbell because I can't



make a fist. All of a sudden that peace or that joy is removed from me. People always say you don't recognize what you have until it's lost—it's axiomatic to say that, but it's very true. When you're dealing with health and fitness, you don't realize what a privilege it is to have movement until something takes that movement away.

**KB:** Yeah, totally true. We have so many discussions now about burnout and attrition, having trouble finding qualified team members, it seems like people are reluctant to recommend the field to others. But in your social media, and when you talk to people who are not in the veterinary community about veterinary medicine, you seem full of joy and you really seem grateful that this is something that you get to do.

It seems like a “get-to” for you and not a “have-to.” I feel like that's what you're talking about.

Do you feel like you take that “get-to” versus “have-to” attitude to work with you, and that's one of the reasons you love it so much?

**CC:** That's a great question. I mainly think about your “how.” There's been a lot of attention towards your “why,” why are you doing this? For a lot of us, our why is common—all of us in some shape or form have an affection towards improving the human-animal bond, working on behalf of the animal, advocating on behalf of animals, and the human-animal bond connection. But how do you do that? Your “how” is aligned with the person that you are. If you tend to be that kind of person where you're very analytical, then your “how” may be veterinary forensics, it may be veterinary research, it may be veterinary anatomic pathology.

I feel like the commonality for all of us is that we are all

working on behalf of improving human-animal relationships, family-pet relationships, the human-animal bond. The question is, how are you doing that? And is that aligned with who you are? For me, fortunately, my how is aligned with who I am. Certainly, advocating on behalf of young people who are interested in the field of veterinary medicine—that really fills my cup, and veterinary surgery does. And looking for innovative techniques—that also fills my cup. Teaching and speaking—that also fills my cup. So for me, as long as my “how” is aligned with who I am, then that makes me feel good.

**KB:** That makes so much sense. We don't talk about the “how” that much; we often think the “how” is secondary and you shouldn't worry so much about the “how” as long as you have the “why.” But the “why” isn't what you're facing

# I feel like the commonality for all of us is that we are all working on behalf of improving human-animal relationships, family-pet relationships, the human-animal bond. The question is, how are you doing that?

Courtney A. Campbell, DVM, DACVS (Small Animal)

every single day when you go to work.

My overall mission hasn't changed in vet med, but going to a general practice every day, working my appointments, doing my surgeries, coming home, that was the wrong "how." And I don't regret having done it, but I don't want to go back to it. My "how" now is so different, but I feel like this is where I can actually contribute because I'm happy every day and I'm motivated to go to work.

**CC:** Right. I like the way you put that because the reality is if you asked me my why, I could probably give you a pretty cogent answer. And if I asked you your "why," you would give a cogent answer. And they would probably be similar. So now that we're both aligned on our why, the question becomes how are we going to execute it? If you say to me, "Courtney, I just really like improving the human-animal bond and advocating on behalf of the animals."

**KB:** Me too.

**CC:** Right. And me too. But you say, "you know what I do, I have this amazing podcast where people get to hear about their experiences in lifestyles of veterinary medicine.

And that's how I do it." And I'm like, "Oh, I have the same why, but I do mine through surgery." We have two different styles of execution. But our why is the exact same.

**KB:** That's so true. And surgery would never be my how. I've done plenty of surgeries, and then, when something went wrong, I would basically lose 10 years off my life so that is not for me.

**CC:** That bead of sweat that pops up on your forehead and your toes start curling and everything. You're like, oh geez, this is not going the way I want it to go.

**KB:** I'm like, is my boss in the building? Can she come in here? Like, can she come in here right now?

**CC:** Of course. Because that six inches in front of your face is your reality and people outside of that reality don't quite understand what's happening. Your reality can change in a heartbeat. So as your nurse anesthetist is talking to you and they're in a good mood because they just went to a nice concert last night and they're talking to you about it. That's great. But then your reality has just

changed a second ago. And now, even though you are in the same room, less than a foot apart, you two are having two totally different experiences. A lot of people don't understand that.

**KB:** I had some questions to ask you. And I'm not going to ask any of them because I like this conversation better. I feel like this is a more personal conversation with you than a lot of people get. And I'm really, I feel really privileged to have had it.

**CC:** I feel overjoyed and I don't even know the time. I'm not even thinking about time, but I know it flew by. ■

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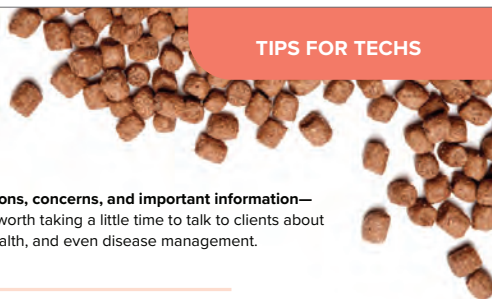


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## Senior Nutrition FAQ

Technicians play an important role in pet nutrition conversations, especially when it comes to senior pets. This excerpt from an interview with Vicky Ograin, MBA, RVT, VTS (Nutrition), lays out some important info that techs can use right away. Read the full FAQ at [aaha.org/seniorcare-toolkit](http://aaha.org/seniorcare-toolkit)



### TIPS FOR TECHS

## Nutrition FAQ

**Senior pet appointments are often packed with questions, concerns, and important information—but appropriate nutrition is critical for senior pets.** It's worth taking a little time to talk to clients about feeding their geriatric companions for longevity, joint health, and even disease management.

Consistency is important. If pet owners hear different messages from different team members, they'll be confused and possibly lose trust in the team's recommendations. This is especially important when it comes to nutrition, which can be an emotionally charged subject for both clients and veterinary professionals.

Vicky Ograin, MBA, RVT, VTS (Nutrition), has spent a lot of her career talking about nutrition, and senior pet appointments are some of her favorites—so she was a natural choice to answer some FAQ about what really matters when it comes to these essential conversations.

#### **Q: Nutrition seems like a really great place to empower technicians.**

**A:** It's so appropriate for technicians to have these conversations. When I was working in clinics and I knew that my recommendations helped people, it fueled my heart and kept my passion for this profession. I've been in it a very, very long time, and I have not lost that passion. Especially with senior pets, it's an amazing journey to go on with them and see them as they mature, and then make sure they've got the best care and nutrition as they navigate their senior years. Hopefully there is a person in the practice who has that passion and wants to have those conversations and support the veterinarian and their schedule.

#### **Q: Why does it seem so difficult to talk to pet owners about nutrition in a way they trust and understand?**

**A:** First off, the pet parents who are coming in desperately love their pets. Particularly with senior pets, they've spent so many years with them, they just want to do what's best for them. Unfortunately, there are mostly well-meaning people on the internet who are basically other pet parents trying to give

advice, and that's what we're up against. So what I'll typically do is I'll ask them what they're feeding and then I ask them why, without any judgment, which can be hard sometimes! But I know they're desperately just trying to do what's right for their pet. When you know that, I think it helps. And then when I understood why they were feeding it, it really helped because sometimes it was that the neighbor recommended it, or it's something they've been feeding their entire lives. You have to get on their level and explain the benefits of the food. This takes a bit of time, but really not that much, and it's valuable to them.

#### **Q: Do senior pets need a senior diet?**

**A:** It depends. I look at diets made by companies that truly research senior pets and understand the nuances of senior nutrition, particularly when we look at protein and minerals, knowing those need to be more controlled for seniors. I think it's important to put them on a senior food, particularly when they get into that geriatric phase.

#### **Q: What about senior pets who are happy on their current diet but develop a condition we might normally recommend a therapeutic diet for? If owners are nervous about switching, how can we have that conversation?**

**A:** I understand that—it's not just the pet, you're also dealing with the pet parent. And they're maybe worried because the cat is a picky eater, the dog likes a particular food, maybe they have other dogs or cats in the house, it's going to be inconvenient... there are lots of things to consider. The one thing I always think about is, what if the kidneys are in that gray area and they are eating an adult or "all life stages" food that has high mineral content? How long are those kidneys going to keep functioning?

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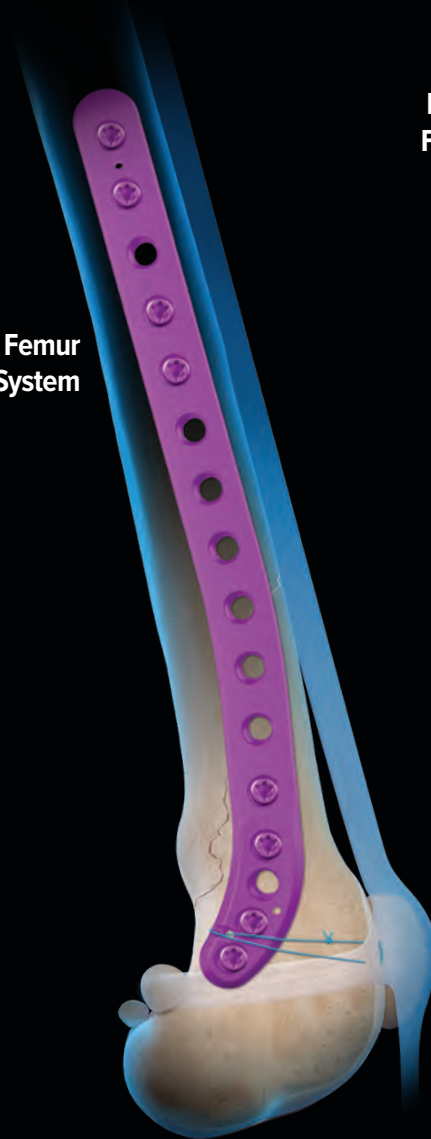
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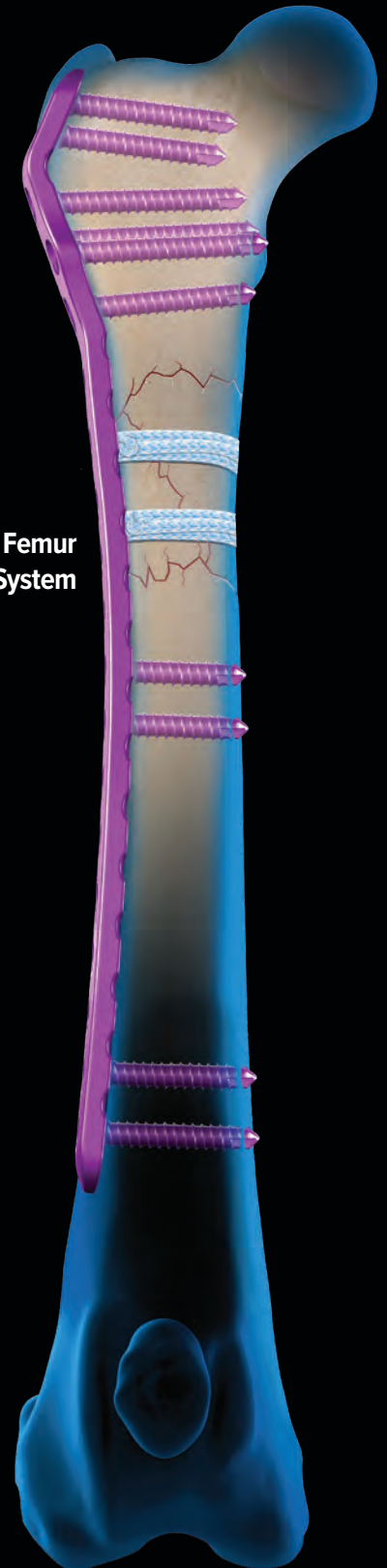
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Distal Femur Fracture System



Proximal Femur Fracture System



Learn more about the  
anatomic Femoral Plating  
System for femur



Reference

1. Arthrex, Inc. Data on file (APT 05236). Naples, FL; 2021.

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