The Veterinarian - Yours to Serve, but The Honour is Ours

Most veterinarians, myself included, knew very early in life what we were meant to do as our life’s work. This knowledge has given most of us the attitude that our work is not just a job we go to 9-5, but rather that it is a calling, as if the universe has ordained us to do an important work. It’s a difficult job and requires a high level of dedication and commitment. It’s no small wonder that the veterinary profession has produced some outstanding individuals that have contributed greatly to the health and welfare of the animal life that sustains human society.

With this in mind I would like to share a recent experience that moved me deeply. A few days ago I attended a social evening of veterinary colleagues that I have been honoured to have as my peers and contemporaries in the profession. The group consists of 20 or so vets that are now the seniors in our profession. Most have served their communities continually for 35 years or more. Most are retired, or like me, semi-retired. A few are still actively practicing, including one 75 year old! The group sprung into being after the funeral of a well respected and beloved colleague, Dr Rex Mears who in addition to running the Dunbar Vet Hospital in Vancouver for many years, also found the time to be an influential leader on both the provincial and national veterinary stages. The group decided to get together yearly so we can stay connected, share stories, learn from each others experiences, spin a few yarns and tip a glass to departed colleagues like our old friend Dr Mears.

As I looked around the room, I was humbled by what I saw. Colleagues whom I have known for years, but suddenly I saw them in a completely different light. It occurred to me that this group collectively has hundreds of years of experience. They have seen hundreds of thousands of patients and between them have diagnosed and treated every known condition that occurs in BC. The combined skill level in the room was nothing short of staggering. There was an animal eye specialist who was part of an eye research group at Vancouver General Hospital and did much of the ground work in the treatment of tumors of the eye of both dogs and humans. There was an expert in marine mammals, who also had his own practice, hosted a radio talk show and still found the time to be one of our leaders. There was a retired pathologist who for years was the director of the provincial veterinary laboratory and is now spending his retirement years working on veterinary problems in underdeveloped countries, and many others who have been “slugging it out in the trenches” of day to day practice on farms and in clinics.

As we visited and shared stories, I told some colleagues how I first met Dr Mears. It was in the summer of 1970 while I was working at the Canadian Wildlife Service Research Lab at UBC after my first year of vet school. We called on Rex to help us with some health problems in our Reindeer and Caribou calves. As I reflected, I sat for a moment in my own thoughts and looked at this distinguished group and felt honored to be numbered among them. It occurred to me that as each of these vets retires, there is a loss to the communities they have served. The accumulated insight into the art and science of veterinary medicine is a gift that each veterinarian takes with him when his or her career winds down.

As I left for home, there happened to be a lady walking a handsome Brittany Spaniel right past my car. I complimented her on her dog and asked if she minded if I petted him. We chatted a bit and she noted that I had just come from a house party. “Yes” I said “You would have no trouble finding a vet for your dog here, there are 20 well known vets here.” “Oh, I used to work for a vet when I was younger” she said. “How interesting!” I replied. “Any one I might know?” “I believe he has passed away, his name was Dr Rex Mears.”

- Dr Anvik
A Cat Parties on Elastic Hair Bands

We thought you might enjoy reading about this case. A one and a half-year old neutered male Domestic Shorthair Cat was presented to us for vomiting and lethargy. X-rays showed a large nest of ribbon like material in the stomach. Dr Powell operated on the cat and removed a tangled mass of large rubber hair bands. It’s quite amazing that the cat managed to swallow all this down. The surgery was successful and the cat recovered completely. We hope he has learned his lesson and stays away from stuff like this in the future. **A word of warning - cats are quite drawn to string like objects and will ingest sewing thread, yarn, tinsel, and string, so keep these things away from your cat!! Be especially cautious during the Christmas holidays.**

Top left photo: X-ray of the cat with a stomach full of elastics. The arrows point to the elastics which appear like a tangled mat of ribbon-like material

Bottom left: Dr Powell successfully removes the foreign material from the cat’s stomach

Bottom right: Shows the material removed from the cats stomach. It's hard to believe that a cat would consume this amount of foreign material!!
Are Home Made Diets Better For Your Pet?

The question of whether or not to make a home made diet for your pet is a complex one to answer. The reasons given for making home made diets is usually based on a lack of trust in the ingredients or processing of commercial diets. This is understandable considering the bad press that surfaces regarding chemicals and toxins that reportedly find their way into pet foods and treats, especially those with ingredients originating outside North America. Locally produced ingredients are not without their share of bad reports either, notably Salmonella, E.coli, Listeriosis and parasites especially in the raw foods category and packing plant “extras” like pig’s ears, hoofs, raw and smoked bones, bull penises and rawhide. Even meats for human consumption can be laced with antibiotics, pesticides and hormones.

So are home made diets any safer or better? The answer is “maybe” but not always. There are two problems. First is sanitary processing and storage time are hard to standardize with home made diets especially with those that are cooked up ahead of time and refrigerated or even frozen. Cross contamination and sterility are hard to control at home. Properly cooking each meal just prior to feeding avoids the storage issues, but may still be a problem with cooking times and temperatures. And it’s a lot of work.

The second problem with home made diets is assuring nutritional balance. Veterinary researchers at the Univ of California (Davis) recently analysed 200 recipes for homemade dog food to determine how many of them meet established nutritional standards. They analyzed recipes from 34 sources including veterinary textbooks, websites and pet care books. The studies showed some surprising and disturbing results!

Out of 200 recipes studied, only nine contained essential nutrients in amounts that met the minimum standards for adult dogs established by the Association of American Feed Control Officials. 8 of the 9 recipes were written by veterinarians. Just 5 recipes - all written by veterinarians- featured essential nutrient concentrations that met the National Research Council’s minimum requirements of adult dogs.

Only 4 recipes were written by board certified veterinary nutrition specialists and all of those had acceptable nutrient profiles for adult dogs.

**Bottom line:** Almost all home made diets, even the ones you find published somewhere are nutritionally incomplete. Formulas that you make up yourself are not necessarily any better. Home made diets, especially ones that are inadequately cooked or stored improperly run the possible risk of contamination with harmful bacteria and parasites.

Commercial diets may have some drawbacks, and some are better than others, but the better ones are properly formulated for balanced nutrition and are processed to be free of contamination by bacteria and parasites. Some do have additives to prevent spoilage, and not all have top quality ingredients, nor can all brands be trusted to be free of antibiotics, pesticides or hormones, but neither can most of the meats and many other foodstuffs you buy at the store unless they are certified organic.

There is no easy way out and like most things in life, choosing a food for your pet may be an issue of compromise. Our advice: Choose a premium brand of commercial pet food. Pay careful attention to labels, details, and reputation of the manufacturer. The most important piece of information on the package is the name and address of the manufacturer. If you are unsure, ask the vet next time you are in. If you choose to make a home made diet of organic ingredients you buy yourself, cook it well, don’t store it for more than a day or two and use a formula that is published by a veterinarian, preferably a board certified veterinary nutritionist.
Parvo is a deadly disease of dogs

An effective vaccine is available

Keep puppies at home until they are fully vaccinated.

**Parvo** is a viral infection of dogs that causes vomiting, diarrhea, intestinal bleeding, dehydration, electrolyte loss and immune suppression. Without proper treatment many dogs go on to die. Puppies between the ages of 2 months and 6 months are particularly susceptible and represent most of the cases that vets see. There is a safe and effective vaccine that prevents infection provided that the vaccine is given at critical times in a puppy’s development. The ideal vaccination timing involves 3 vaccines starting at 8 weeks of age and giving monthly thereafter, ie, boosters at 12 weeks and 16 weeks of age. Currently we recommend a booster one year later and every 3 years thereafter. This schedule is very effective and departures from the recommended timing can result in a lower level of protection sometimes with devastating consequences.

A typical scenario is a situation where a new dog owner gets a puppy at 6-8 weeks old that has had one puppy vaccine prior to sale or no shots at all. The seller tells the new owner that the pup has had “all his shots” or gives the new owner incorrect advice regarding vaccines. The newbie owner assumes that the puppy is good to go and doesn’t pursue boosters, or doesn’t understand the importance of timing of follow up shots. A month later the pup is brought to the vet vomiting and in a state of rapidly advancing dehydration and collapse. The pup is admitted as an intensive care patient, lab work is done and IV fluids and other drugs are given. The pup stays typically for 5-7 days and assuming he recovers from this life-threatening disease, goes home with a large vet bill. Parvo pups are a lot of work for the hospital team, and in spite of modern methods and intensive care, some do not pull through. **It’s far better and way cheaper to vaccinate puppies properly and on time!!**

Besides a proper vaccination protocol, there are other steps a new pup owner can take to reduce the risk of infection. Steps should be taken to avoid exposure to environments that may be contaminated with the virus. Keep a new puppy at home until he has finished the vaccine series. Owners should also avoid visiting sites where sick dogs may be housed. You can track the virus home on your shoes or clothing. Parvovirus particles are very hardy. They can persist in the soil where an infected dog has defecated for 6 months or more. **Do not take a young, incompletely vaccinated puppy for walks on places like the Rotary Trail, parks and playgrounds. Many irresponsible dog owners do not pick up after their dogs and if such a dog is shedding the virus, the soil becomes contaminated.**

The good news is that after several decades of vaccinating, the incidence of Parvovirus infections in our community is a fraction of what it used to be. Still, outbreaks occur far more commonly than they should, considering an effective vaccine is available. We just need to get the message out to the segment of the dog owning public that doesn’t know about this serious disease and how to prevent it.
Adventures with Banjo

“Last summer Dr Jack took me to a Bluegrass Festival on Vancouver Island. It was a lot of fun. There were lots of other “Banjos” there. Dr Jack attended some workshops and jammed with other musicians while I got to meet some of my American cousins”.

“Here I am with two of my relatives from West Virginia”

Kitty Capers

It’s a common belief that cats purr because they are happy. A relaxed cat being petted will often purr, close it’s eyes and enter a trance like state that to us looks like the ultimate state of bliss. There is also an assumption that a purring cat is a healthy, well cat and that is not necessarily true. Cats will sometimes purr when they are injured, frightened or in pain. Some cats purr while they are giving birth, nursing, sick, or stressed. Some have even been known to purr as they are dying. At the animal hospital, we commonly see severely injured cats that are purring.

Purring seems to be more an expression of some strong emotion - whether positive or negative - than it is an expression of any particular emotion, including happiness. Purring by a cat might be similar to humming or whistling by a human. It is commonly done out of happiness, but it may also be done as a result of stress, fright or discomfort.

Animal scientists theorise that there is an association between purring and the release of “feel good” chemicals like serotonin and oxytocin in the brain. They suspect that purring also releases endorphins which are naturally occurring morphine-like substances that can help relieve pain and produce a calming effect. This theory totally makes sense as it would be an adaptation to cope with stress, fear and pain.
Animal Trivia

Bats always turn left when exiting a bat cave.

The British Rock Band “Procol Harum” known for the classic pop song “A Whiter Shade of Pale” was actually named after a friend’s Burmese Cat, whose registered name was Procol Harun, Procol being the breeders prefix.

(Ed. note for music lovers: The haunting Baroque like Hammond Organ counter melody played throughout A Whiter Shade of Pale is actually based on Bach’s Orchestral Suite #3 in D major)

Healthy adult cats are in deep sleep 15 percent of their lives. They are in light sleep 50 percent of the time. That leaves just 35 percent awake time, or roughly 6-8 hours a day.

Historians believe that the first animal that humans domesticated was the goat.

Dr Jack’s Wisdom

We never know the value of water until the well goes dry
Don’t Count Out Old Dogs

A Doberman, a squirrel and a cougar walk into a bar ....oops, that’s the wrong joke. Let’s start again.

An old Doberman starts chasing rabbits and before long, discovers that he’s lost. Wandering about, he notices a cougar heading rapidly in his direction with the intention of having lunch.

The old Doberman thinks, “Oh, oh! I’m in trouble now!”

Noticing some bones on the ground close by, he immediately settles down to chew on the bones with his back to the approaching cat. Just as the cougar is about to leap, the old Doberman exclaims loudly, “Boy, that was one delicious cougar! I wonder if there are any more around here?”

Hearing this, the young cougar stops his attack in mid strike and a look of terror comes over him as he slinks away into the trees.

“Whew!,” says the cougar to himself, “That was close! That old Doberman almost had me!”

Meanwhile, a squirrel who had been watching the whole scene from a nearby tree, figures he can put this knowledge to good use and trade it for protection from the cougar, so, off he goes. The squirrel soon catches up with the cougar, spills the beans and strikes a deal for himself with the cougar.

The young cougar is furious at being made a fool of and says, “Here, squirrel, hop on my back and see what’s going to happen to that conniving canine!”

Now the old Doberman sees the cougar coming with the squirrel on his back and thinks, “What am I going to do now?” but instead of running, the dog sits down with his back to his attackers, pretending he hasn’t seen them yet, and just when they get close enough to hear, the old Doberman says ...

“Where is that darn squirrel? I sent him off an hour ago to bring me another cougar!”

_Moral:_

Don’t mess with old dogs Age and skill will always overcome youth and treachery! Wisdom and brilliance only come with age and experience.