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What's Next for Independent Hospitals?

By Ginni Hamele, President

> When The Veterinary Cooperative started, the big pressure on independent veterinary hospitals was purchasing power — being able to purchase products at prices that would keep them competitive against corporate clinics in the marketplace. As TVC grew its membership and vendor partnerships, it also developed an education platform to help shareholders with learning good business and financial practices to go along with their clinical expertise.

Now, it's 2021. While purchasing power and education remain important, other pressure points have evolved, and TVC's goal is to develop solutions in new areas to meet the changing needs of its shareholders.

Independent hospitals are seeking support in new areas such as longevity and business operations. They're wondering how to plan for a transition, and how to do it so the hospital remains independent.

A lot of independent hospitals are 1-3 doc shops. They can't fully employ a CVPM because it doesn't make sense for their needs.

At the same time, the next generation of veterinarians are seeking a collective voice to speak to them and show them that independent ownership is an incredible opportunity. In 2021 and beyond, TVC aims to be that collective voice of independent veterinary hospitals.

Other areas TVC will branch out to in the future include:

Mentoring and study groups. While other study groups exist in veterinary medicine, there's a way for us to step into that space with a unique offering — business analytics, benchmarking and best practice sharing. We can also inject a developmental piece into the groups, where we put the next generation of veterinarians in those spaces and create a community so they can talk to those that own the practices to figure out, across the nation, where there might be opportunities.

Practice management. A lot of independent hospitals are 1-3 doc shops. They can't fully employ a CVPM because it doesn't make sense for their needs. Yet, they

could benefit from the expertise of that position. TVC is in a position to provide CVPM expertise and consulting for independent hospitals.

Staff training. Individually, staff training is a heavy burden for a lot of independent hospitals to do. TVC is looking to create training paths and programs at the independent hospital level, be it a practice manager, tech, front desk staff, whatever the position, and help facilitate that training.

Leadership training. Many independent hospitals have promoted a tech or front desk staff member to a practice management position because of his or her hard work and good business sense. We want to create a program that helps develop them as a leader for the business, because often they set the culture within the whole team. TVC believes that by investing in the team, they in, turn, invest in you, which will create more job satisfaction, keep team members happy in the culture that they're in and hold on to the staff you have.

It's a lot to look forward to. With a solid foundation of purchasing power and education, TVC and its shareholders are ready for the next step.

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TVC News

2021 TVC Shareholder Profit Dividend Program Announced

In early March, TVC finalized the 2021 Shareholder Profit Dividend (SPD) program. The SPD is a unique opportunity to earn an additional rebate for your hospital, funded by TVC profits, based solely on your cooperative spirit and loyalty to TVC vendor partners. We invite you to participate! Check out the 2021 SPD program here.

TVC Annual Shareholder Meeting Recording Available

TVC's Annual Shareholder Meeting is now available on-demand. The meeting is a Shareholder requirement, and included content ranging from TVC's current state of the cooperative to our vision for the future. The meeting also detailed TVC's new 5STARvet initiative which aims to give support in the areas of practice management, employee recruitment, transition planning and more. View the recording.

Dr. Ronald Anders Named as Inaugural Winner of the Cooperative Spirit Award

The first Cooperative Spirit Award was recently awarded to the wonderful Dr. Ron Anders — a 38-year independent veterinary practitioner and owner of Country Animal Hospital of Coldwater, Ohio. Rich Morris, TVC's founder, contacted Ron when he was developing his vision for the future of The Veterinary Cooperative. Dr. Anders worked tirelessly to support the unique needs of independent veterinary practices across America. Dr. Anders enjoyed talking to TVC staff at conferences, board meetings, and retreats. He especially liked talking to potential Shareholders about the benefits of independent veterinarians working together toward a greater good. At his core, he fought to ensure that private practice did not become a thing of the past. More information about the 2022 TVC Cooperative Spirit Award will be announced later this year.

Vendor News

ASPCA Pet Health Insurance partners with CheckN

Our partners at ASPCA Pet Health Insurance have noticed a need for a more comprehensive clinic check-in technology, so they have partnered with CheckN are are providing the service at no charge! CheckN is ready to use immediately on any mobile device, laptop, or desktop within your hospital. No integrations needed with your existing practice software, and it stands as a long term solution for automating your client check in process. With no cost to you or your clients, CheckN provides you with additional client information such as pet concerns, requests for food, or prescription refills, making the curbside check-in process more efficient for you and your client. Learn more here.

Ceva launces CARDALIS™

We are excited to share that our partners at Ceva are launching CARDALISTM, the only FDA approved drug with a unique combination of Benazepril HCl plus Spironolactone for the management of congestive heart failure (CHF) in dogs. CARDALISTM has been clinically proven to slow down disease progression through effective RAAS suppression, and the convenient, chewable tablet provides half of the ACVIM quadtherapy recommendation for congestive heart failure. Spironolactone is the essential addition to an ACE inhibitor. Now veterinarians will have a new tool in CARDALISTM chewable tablets, as studies have shown 87.6% patient acceptance — solving owner compliance challenges. Find out more about CARDALISTM here and learn about pricing here.



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Vendor News

Hill's Global Symposium set for April 20, 2021

The Hill's Global Symposium, hosted virtually, is set for 2021 and promises to "make itching ancient history," with its comprehensive line-up of educational speakers. The virtual event offers 5.5 Hours of RACE CE Credits,

and covers topics ranging from, "Getting the most out of the tele-dermatology consultation" to "Hocus pocus vet dermatology: curtain lifted and myths revealed!" Canine Atopic Dermatitis topics include diagnostics, tele-dermatology, compliance, treatment, and communication. Learn more & register here.

Education & Events

An Innovative Leap: Advancements in the Treatment of Mast Cell Tumors

March 31, 2021 | 9 AM & 12 PM CST



Shaping the future of animal health

Part 1: Update on Mast Cell Tumors RACE-Approved CE Credit: 0.5 hours

Abstract: In this presentation, we will briefly review the clinical journey from understanding and identifying mast cell tumors in dogs, to grading and staging MCTs and then evaluating factors that may impact treatment considerations. Lastly, we will briefly review current treatment options.

Part 2: Tigilanol Tiglate: New Treatment Option for MCTs in Dogs

RACE-Approved CE Credit: 0.5 hours

Abstract: This presentation will introduce a unique, innovative molecule, Tigilanol Tiglate (STELFONTA®): an exciting new way to treat mast cell tumors in dogs with an intratumoral injection providing an alternative to surgery.

Register here!

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Improving Client Compliance

The influx of new pet parents presents an opportunity for veterinary practices to get more pets on parasite prevention.

By Graham Garrison

Have your appointment times been filling up at a relentless pace? Judging by industry research, you are not alone. There has been a massive influx of new pet owners who are going to need help navigating preventive medicine for their pets.

"We have seen a great increase in the number of new patients," said Dr. Cindy Cook, DVM, TVC Shareholder and owner of Jamestown, Tennessee-based Dogwood Animal Hospital. "It has been very difficult to make enough time for the new patients and continue to adequately serve our existing patients."

Nationally, results from the "Embracing Pet Care for Life" survey revealed that taking care of a new pet, especially during a pandemic, may not be as simple as one may think.

While many people found comfort during the COVID-19 pandemic by bringing home new dogs for companionship, the survey found that 73% of those who became dog owners for the first time had considered re-homing once the pandemic ends. Other findings included:

- > One in four (25%) also claim they don't have enough information to properly care for their dog.
- Among new dog owners who brought home puppies, more than half (58%) say they wish taking care of their pet's

- health didn't take so much time, and 33% were surprised to find out how much it costs to care for their pet.
- > Survey results indicated that 70% of all dog owners said they would like to learn new ways to keep their dog healthy, whether a puppy or fully grown.
- More than one-third (38%) of pandemic puppy owners say they were surprised by how much attention their pet requires.

An "unexpected hurdle"

Specific to parasite prevention, one-third (35%) of pandemic first-time dog owners say giving their dog flea and tick preventative treatments has been an unexpected hurdle, ranking this responsibility as even more difficult than housebreaking. Nearly one-third (29%) of all pandemic puppy owners, including both experienced and first-time dog owners, said they were surprised to learn how much parasites can impact their dog's health.

Dr. Cook said Bravecto-1 Month chews are a great option to start new puppies on. "Then their treatment can continue uninterrupted with the Bravecto-3. No secondary product will be needed."

For first-time puppy owners, Merck Animal Health recommends its Bravecto® (furalaner) 1-Month Chews to protect dogs 8-weeks of age or older from fleas and ticks; and once they reach 6-months or older, the process remains effective and easy — dogs can then transition to Bravecto® (furalaner) Chews which is a single dose that provides extended duration protection for dogs for a total of 12-weeks of flea and tick protection, said Nicole Sinclair-Torre, VMD, MBA, and a member of the professional services veterinarian team at Merck Animal Health USA. Additionally, both puppies and adult dogs can be



Virtual care

Overall, more than half of pandemic dog owners say they wish taking care of their dog's health was easier and less time consuming (57% and 56%, respectively), according to Merck's survey. Nearly half of pre-pandemic dog owners feel the same way (46% and 34%, respectively); however, only 19% of them say they have spoken to their vet more often during the pandemic.

Pet Care Tip: Your entire veterinary team can be a great resource for pet care advice, including the veterinarian nurses at your local clinic. As a pet owner, consider writing down all pet care questions and/or challenges in advance to gather trustworthy advice from the veterinarian during the next visit. And for dog owners having trouble scheduling in-person or curbside veterinary appointments, ask the veterinary team about telemedicine and if a virtual visit is possible.

exposed to internal parasites, so it is just as important for owners to pair-up their flea and tick medication with a complementary product, said, such as Sentinel® Spectrum® Chews (milbemycin oxime, lufenuron, and praziquantel), which offer broad-spectrum, internal and external parasite protection.

Dr. Cook said it is important to establish a client patient relationship as early in a pet's life as possible. "This helps to improve client compliance in the form of reminders and education. In turn, it benefits the pet greatly."

Maintain a preventative care schedule

Nearly one-fourth of pandemic first-time dog owners (22%) report they have encountered unexpected challenges when trying to schedule veterinary appointments, according to Merck's "Embracing Pet Care for Life" survey. Approximately

one-third (27%) of people who owned dogs prior to the pandemic said this was a challenge for them, as well.

Pet Care Tip: Regular veterinarian visits are key to preventing health issues among dogs, especially when it comes to recommended core vaccinations that protect them from serious diseases. A monthly schedule can help. Talk to your veterinarian about a preventative care schedule and try not to skip any appointments. Also, keep

in mind that recommendations for some vaccines and other preventative measures may vary depending on the dog's overall lifestyle, activity levels and local climate, so talk to a veterinarian about your dog's unique needs.





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Solid Bonds

Wellness plans offer a way for clinics to help solidify the veterinary-client relationship while increasing revenue on core products and services.



> Like most businesses, South Mississippi Animal Health Center was hit hard by the shelter-in-place orders in the early days of the pandemic. And three hurricanes during the summer and fall only added to the disruptions.

The saving grace? A forward-looking business approach, said Craig Fraser, whose wife Dr. Brandy Womack owns SMAHC. Wellness plans, online rebates, and home delivery all kept revenue coming through the door in April and May despite the clinic being closed to walk-in traffic. "If a veterinary clinic is not doing those things, they're going to get their lunch eaten by the competition." Fraser said.

A fit for today's consumer

For new pet owners and long-time clients alike, particularly in a time of uncertainty with a pandemic and high unemployment, wellness plans have struck a chord. "First and foremost is they help lead to healthier lives, thus more birthdays for the pet," said Dr. Bob Lester, chief medical officer of WellHaven Pet Health. Lester said in successfully run wellness practices, as much as

90% of revenue can come from both wellness plan services and other services delivered to WP clients. Not just from wellness services, but from additional services and procedures that veterinarians recommended as a result of doing good preventive care.

Interest in wellness plans has actually risen in the last 8-10 months, despite limitations on in-person contact with clients. "At first, we were a little bit worried, because getting a family to enroll in a subscription care plan typically takes place in the exam room," Lester said. "You've got to have their trust and be able to describe it to them. It's a little

more difficult when they're in the car or you're doing it by text or through an open window out the parking lot."

Pet parents have responded in large part because of the benefits wellness plans offer in budgeting for care. "They're bonded to that pet. They love that pet. But they really like to hear that 'Hey, for \$50 to \$60 a month, all of my office calls are covered, all of my preventive care is covered. If my pet ever sneezes or looks sideways, I can just call and get my pet in and my veterinarian will take a look. It's all covered as part of the plan. I think that has made it more attractive and outweighs any of the difficulties of getting that initial enrollment."

Wellness plans fit with today's dominant consumer, who Lester refers to as PetGen. It's a combination of millennial and Gen Z, which prefer subscription services like Netflix or Dollar Shave Club and are willing to spend the money on their pet's care in a similar way. "There's never been a generation that's more open to preventive care than today's generation."

Financial win for the practice

Lester said the veterinary profession has been built through a standardized model — brick-and-mortar, one doctor, one exam room and one appointment once a year. But within that model, there is little time for educating clients on everything involved in a pet's preventive care, including immunizations, nutrition, parasites, dental care, behavior, etc. "Another huge advantage with wellness plans is you will typically touch the pet 3-5 time a year, and not all necessarily in an exam room. Some

could be virtual telehealth, phone calls, and texting. But you get those multiple touches to really educate the client."

If the practice is getting 3-5 touches a year instead of one, and the pet is living 2-3 years longer, it's a huge win financially. "So it's a win for the pets, it's a win for the pet owner, and it's a win for the financial health of the practice and the wellness of the team," Lester said. "You can better even out scheduling. When there used to be slow times in the year, you could push a lot of your wellness care things into the slow times of year."

The Big 5

Lester said the preventive services that see the biggest bump in revenue from wellness plans can be broken down into five categories:

- > Immunizations
- > Parasite prevention
- > Dental care
- > Nutrition
- > Behavior

"If pet parents embraced those, then it would really come down to compliance. We wouldn't need wellness plans if pet parents were 100% compliant with all the recommendations I make when I walk into an exam room with my white coat stethoscope to discuss their pet's health."

Economists would say the shift in mindset is a case of turns vs. earns. The veterinary profession has been stuck in a one-transaction mindset, Lester said. "We all talk about the average transaction fee, the average patient charge, we look at that one-time visit. And we kind of build all our metrics around that ... We've got to move from this idea of earned, that it's all about one transaction, to just how many times we can touch and build a deeper relationship with the pet parents."

Embracing preventative care

Lester said it's important not to think of a wellness plan as a loyalty program. A wellness plan is truly embracing preventive care. "It's making that the center of your practice, your lifeblood. Instead of seeing a diabetic case and thinking of the diagnostics you have to work up, you're thinking, 'I've seen this pet for four or five years. We haven't done a good enough job educating them on exercise and nutrition and other things. Shame on us for dropping the ball. So we really have to embrace preventive care and be all about it."

Once veterinary practices do embrace preventative care, then it simply becomes a part of the routine from the time their client service representative is on the phone, to their website, to making sure it's part of the offerings being discussed by the veterinarian or veterinary technician. Team members need to be believers of and participants in the wellness plans.

"It's not a little add on widget to the practice. It's got to be central."

Supplement sales skyrocket during pandemic



Pet supplement sales rose 21% last year to nearly \$800 million, according to a new report from Packaged Facts. The veterinary care sector captured an estimated 46% of the revenue, the largest share. According to the report, dog owners spent four times as much as cat owners on pet supplements. Additionally, the report said, "41% of pet owners are paying closer attention to their pets' health and

wellness because of COVID-19." Packaged Facts predicts pet supplement sales will rise by about \$50 million annually through 2025, Today's Veterinary Business reports.

Millennials overtake Gen X in the veterinary profession: AVMA

Millennials are surpassing Generation X as the leading age group in the U.S. veterinary workforce, according to data from the AVMA. Millennials this year make up 35.1% of the workforce. Generation X makes up 34.6%, baby boomers make up 29.9%, and the silent generation are at 0.4%. Most new veterinarians entering the workforce are millennials, while baby boomers and the remaining silents are moving toward retirement. This generational shift will likely lead to significant changes in the profession, the association said, including changes in work-life integration, a new emphasis on mentorship, greater adoption of new technology, and new client insights.

Trained dogs detect COVID 94% of the time, study finds

A German veterinary clinic says its trained dogs that can detect COVID-19 with 94% accuracy, even if people are asymptomatic, Deutsche Welle reports. The dogs were conditioned to sniff out the "coronavirus odor" emitted from cells in infected people, said Esther Schalke, a veterinarian at Germany's armed forces school for service dogs. "So dogs can really sniff out people with infections, as well as asymptomatic and symptomatic COVID patients," said Holger Volk, head of the clinic at the University of Veterinary Medicine Hanover, where dogs are being trained. Stephan Weil. the state premier of Lower Saxony, said he was impressed with the study and called for more tests before the dogs are put to work in the real world.

AVMA and AAHA release small animal telehealth guidelines

The American Veterinary Medical Association and the American Animal Hospital Association <u>released</u> a new guide to help small-animal practices improve their telehealth procedures.

The AAHA/AVMA Telehealth Guidelines for Small-Animal Practice are meant to supplement the AVMA's overarching telehealth guidelines, which the association released earlier in February.

"During the pandemic, a survey of companion animal practices reported a strong increase in the use of telehealth, from 10% to 30%," said Dr. Douglas Kratt, AVMA president. "Telehealth has supported better and more timely communication with our clients



during a time when maintaining physical distance has been critical to their health and the health of the staff in our practices.

"Beyond this immediate need, our experience with telehealth has given us insight into the opportunities remote technologies present for integrating Al into our diagnostic workups and ongoing monitoring of our patients, which ultimately will support more timely intervention when their health is challenged."

The guidelines focus on practical integration of telehealth into practice operations, by identifying and using telehealth "champions," streamlining workflow and successfully monetizing its use. Additional topics include considerations for device and platform selection and internal and external marketing strategies.





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