



President-elect Kathleen MacMillan, DVM, discusses the future of the CVMA

# Veterinary Practice News



March 2026

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How to get parasites  
**TO BUG OFF**

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TAPING**  
Does it really work?

**USING  
CT SCANS**  
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**FRESH FOOD**  
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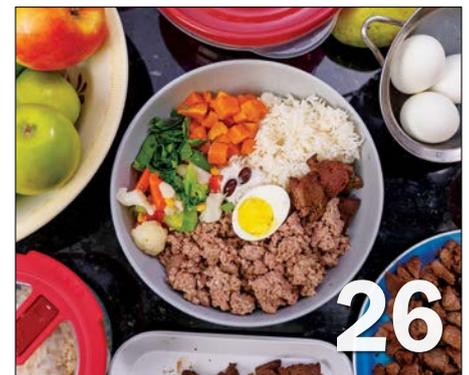
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# A year of renewal, together



New beginnings are shaped by steady improvements, informed by evidence, teamwork, and thoughtful adoption of innovation.

Improving nutrition is often one of the changes we aim to make when a new year begins. A few months into the year will show whether that resolution was truly realistic. What we eat has a big impact on us, and that's why it matters. This includes all family members, even the furry ones.

I have such a fur-nephew, Max, a three-year-old German shepherd. Now, this breed is known for finding treats around the home and digging in; Max is no exception. The latest treat was pizza, which is delicious in moderation but not for dogs.

If there's a box of half-eaten pizza left on the table overnight, what's to stop a curious dog from investigating and discovering something new to try? Picture him standing on his hind legs and nudging the box open. Of course, crumbs on the floor beneath the empty box, which will be more noticeable in the morning, are sure giveaways.

Nutrition continues to spark lively discussions in clinics and exam rooms. Specialty diets remain crucial in managing chronic disease, weight, and gastrointestinal health, guided by nutritional standards.

At the same time, interest in the fresh pet food movement has grown. These conversations call for careful evaluation of trends, evidence, and individual patient needs. Veterinarians remain uniquely positioned to provide balanced, science-informed guidance that helps clients navigate marketing and misinformation alike.

Just as doctors tell us to eat fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as foods found along the perimeter of the grocery store, pet parents hear the same message from veterinary practitioners. In this issue of *Veterinary Practice News Canada*, Laura Gaylord, DVM, DACVIM (Nutrition), discusses the fresh pet food movement on page 26.

"Fresh pet food is the fastest-growing segment of the pet food market worldwide, according to the pet food industry," writes Dr. Gaylord.

"In veterinary practice, it is important to recognize pet owners' motivations behind feeding fresh food, and practitioners can provide a balanced, unbiased perspective," continues Gaylord.

Underpinning all of this are what many in the profession refer to as the three Cs in pet care: communication, collaboration, and consistency. In her article on page 18, Courtney A. Campbell, DVM, DACVS-SA, goes into the three Cs she developed.

"Choice, Continuity, and Critical Care. My goal was to develop a practical and empathetic approach that helps pet parents feel more prepared and confident in navigating the financial aspects of pet ownership, ultimately enabling them to make the best possible care decisions in a multi-species household," shares Dr. Campbell.

These principles apply not only to client relationships but within the veterinary team itself.

This year, we are pleased to introduce a new column, "Vet Tech View," which will spotlight the perspectives of registered veterinary technicians (RVTs). The column, authored by Kate Stockmann-Fetter of the Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians (OAVT), aims to share practical insights and best practices, including how practice managers and owners can better leverage RVTs across clinical and operational settings. In a profession built on teamwork, elevating these voices strengthens the entire practice.

Until next time, enjoy! 🐾

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# Wired for wildlife

A vet tech's take on how technology transforms exotic care

By Melissa Ortiz, LVT

When many of us started out in the veterinary industry, the standard for monitoring, especially with exotics, was manual observation. This was not because we collectively decided it was best practice. Rather, it was because even the most robust available technology at the time provided less usable information than visual cues and a stethoscope.

Over the past few decades, monitoring equipment has come a long way. Now, it not only offers reliable parameters for veterinary care but also an infrastructure of support and innovation built to help drive the industry forward.

## History of healthcare

The most apparent problem with technicians performing patient monitoring by hand is the limited depth of the available information. Even the most skilled practitioners can only glean so much from a Doppler over the animal's heart and visually check for respiration. Timing can also be an issue, as the more subtle changes that indicate possible complications are not always visible to the naked eye. Delays in detection result in delays in intervention, and every second is critical when managing patients under anesthesia.

There are also some less obvious issues resulting from manual monitoring. With the technician as the primary line of defense on patient observation, they are unavailable to perform other tasks to assist in surgery without leaving the patient unmonitored. One such role that often goes unfulfilled in these scenarios is recordkeeping. Every veterinary professional knows that detailed notes from a procedure are one of the best tools for patient care. Not only do they help inform future care, but they can also be invaluable in protecting the care team against litigation if a patient complication results in morbidity. However, manual monitoring offers neither the time nor the detailed measurements needed to adequately document vitals.

## Wired for wildlife

Veterinarians are used to the technology in our industry being slightly less robust than what's used in human medicine, and this disparity was especially felt in monitoring. While human patients all have the same basic anatomical structure and a relatively small range of vital measurements, companion animals come in all shapes, sizes, and measurement ranges. Developing a monitor that can accommodate a parakeet weighing only a handful of grams with rapid heart rate and respiration, while also having the capabilities for a 45-kg (100-lb) tortoise with much slower vitals and lower temperatures, is a significant feat in engineering.



Access to multiple parameters that accurately monitor patient condition is critical to boosting a veterinarian's confidence during a procedure.

Photos courtesy Melissa Ortiz



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\*\*For dogs and puppies as young as 8 weeks or weighing greater than 1.4 kg  
1. Rufener L, Danelli V, Bertrand D, Sager H. The novel isoxazoline ectoparasiticide lotilaner (Credelio<sup>™</sup>): a non-competitive antagonist specific to invertebrates  $\gamma$ -aminobutyric acid-gated chloride channels (GABA<sub>A</sub>Cl<sub>s</sub>). Parasites & Vectors. 2017 Dec;10(1):1-5.  
2. Reif, Kathryn E., et al. "Comparative speed of kill provided by lotilaner (Credelio<sup>™</sup>), sarolaner (Simparica Trio<sup>™</sup>), and afoxolaner (NexGard<sup>™</sup>) to control *Amblyomma americanum* infestations on dogs." Parasites & Vectors 17.1 (2024): 313.  
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Utilizing loops and a tail clip enables vital readings from this mouse, which weighs 70 g.



The wide range of equipment available for each parameter allows for the monitoring of everything from rodents to reptiles, including this bearded dragon.

Accomplishing a monitor that was well-suited to companion animals required both software and hardware considerations.

“Because of the number of species and care considerations for each of them, developing veterinary-specific parameters involves extensive research, including collaborating with top industry experts to build out a pool of data and guarantee a high level of scientific rigor and clinical relevance,” says Eduardo Miranda, president of Digicare Animal Health, a company that manufactures multiparameter monitors for the veterinary industry.

A unique algorithm created specifically for animal health incorporates specialized QRS detection and classification criteria to ensure accurate readings tailored to animals’ unique cardiac characteristics. This helps minimize the risk of double-counting, false positives, and other misinterpretations that can be common with systems that have not been optimized for veterinary settings.

Along with taking on the role of patient monitoring, some systems have also been designed to provide recordkeeping services. These additional features log patient vitals in real time and produce a detailed report at the end of the procedure, freeing up the technician for other less menial tasks during the anesthetic event. Some monitors even offer cloud-based memory systems to easily store and access patient data for increased efficiency.

### Optimized equipment

Exotics often exist in extremes, usually going either far below or far above the range of typical monitors. The wider range of measurement capabilities was initially what drew my team to the monitoring solution we currently use, and now we can notice potential issues faster, respond more meaningfully and improve overall patient outcomes. However, flexibility was also an important consideration in the hardware and accessories available with our system.

Variety is key in the physical design of a monitoring system. The attachments and probes that connect to the animal to provide real-time vitals input should be available in a range of options

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With the accessories now available, veterinary professionals no longer have to solely rely on manual monitoring while treating patients, such as this guinea pig.

that work with the patient's anatomy without compromising accuracy or harming the animal. An esophageal EKG lead with nodes that flush with the rest of the wiring instead of protruding can prevent pressure necrosis in smaller patients.

Loops in the wires can be used instead of clips to attach to animals with small parts and fragile skin or bones. We had a rat in our clinic to remove a mass that weighed 100 grams, which was about a third of the animal's entire mass. Our system offered a tiny cuff that we were able to attach around the circumference of her tail to improve the available information and enhance the surgeon's confidence during this delicate procedure.

Even a shortened SpO<sub>2</sub> probe can provide easier access. Veterinary monitors are typically designed for dogs and cats, which both have easily penetrable skin for placing the sensor. For animals with hard-to-pierce skin on their legs, such as birds, a shortened probe provides the practitioner with the flexibility to place the sensor somewhere with easier access. Wings, toes, and even tails are all options available with a shortened probe that offer easy attachment without harming the animal or sacrificing data accuracy.

For the first time, these features have provided our clinic with the capability to provide comprehensive monitoring services for patients of all sizes. The system is intuitive, allowing all members of the staff to easily access and utilize the technology even between different species, and it provides us with a level of confidence during procedures that previous solutions simply could not match.

This versatility improves outcomes for patients, but it can also open opportunities for collaboration with additional entities. Zoos, shelters, reserves, and other animal care facilities may not have the resources available to provide veterinary-specific monitoring.

A monitoring system that is adaptable can go beyond companion animals and make the practice a valuable partner for well-rounded care. We have been able to offer services for local zoos and other animal health organizations all on the same system that we use in the clinic every day. Not only does this offer another source of revenue for our clinic,

but it also allows us to elevate the level of exotics to a broader community.

### Better together

In addition to partnerships between these businesses, collaboration with manufacturers and end users can help secure success.

Even if a clinic is not actively providing feedback for its equipment, ongoing communication with the manufacturer is still critical for ensuring the best results. Quality customer service is always appreciated, but it is especially important with monitoring in the veterinary industry. The variety of attachments and ranges that need to be learned for each animal patient would make training employees on veterinary monitoring a challenge in and of itself. However, the staffing shortages and high turnover rates faced by clinics across the industry further exacerbate the issue.

Working with a manufacturer that prioritizes ease of use is critical. This can be accomplished in the engineering of the machine itself, but it can also be accomplished with continued contact and training resources. A company that will work with the clinic in the months and years following a purchase to ensure all staff members are comfortable using the equipment shows investment in both the business' success and the health of the patients.

We have come a long way since the best available method was watching to make sure an animal's chest was rising and falling. The growing accuracy and capability of veterinary monitoring parameters have been accompanied by an equally exciting increase in accessories, design, and usability, all optimized for animal health. As the collaboration between manufacturers and veterinary professionals maintains this momentum of creating new and exciting innovations, we will continue to gain more insights into an animal's condition that allows us to provide the standard of care that both the industry and our patients deserve. 🐾

*Melissa Ortiz (MO), LVT, is the practice manager at Thrive Center for Avian and Exotic Medicine NYC, the only exotics-exclusive hospital in New York City, and can be reached at [melissa.ortiz@thrivepet.com](mailto:melissa.ortiz@thrivepet.com).*

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1. Canadian Zenrelia product label.  
2. Forster S, Boegel A, Despa S, et al. Comparative efficacy and safety of ilunocitinib and oclacitinib for the control of pruritus and associated skin lesions in dogs with atopic dermatitis. *Veterinary Dermatology*. 2025;00:1-10.



■ The Humane Society of Oakville, Milton, and Halton (HSOMH) received a historic \$10 million donation from philanthropist Klaus Bytzek, aimed at enhancing support for pets and their owners in the community while funding a new animal centre. Jeff Vallentin, executive director, highlighted that this significant contribution advances their vision for the future and provides immediate assistance to the animals currently in their care. 🐾



■ Researchers at the University of California, Davis, have discovered that feline infectious peritonitis (FIP), a deadly disease caused by a mutated feline coronavirus, infects a wider range of immune cells than previously believed. The study, published in *Veterinary Microbiology*, found the virus actively replicates inside B and T lymphocytes, cells critical for immune defence. This breakthrough challenges long-held assumptions and offers a valuable model for studying chronic coronavirus-related conditions in humans, including long COVID.

■ The Government of Saskatchewan is launching the Saskatchewan Animal Enforcement Agency (SAEA) on April 1, replacing the Animal Protection Services, which will close on March 31, 2026. This transition preserves the current setup where Regina manages its own enforcement separately from the provincial service provider. Agriculture Minister David Marit supports this move to strengthen enforcement of animal welfare. The SAEA will offer additional support to local rescues and aims to improve training and response times for enforcement officers. The agency was established following public consultations and commits to operating with integrity and transparency to enhance animal protection.

■ At the start of 2026, a non-profit foster pet care launched in B.C. Best friends Priya Sharma and Kayleigh Busch founded Recovery Tails Society, an organization that provides free, short-term pet care for people entering mental health and substance use treatment on Vancouver Island. Both Sharma and Busch have over ten years of combined experience in outreach, intake, and treatment coordination. The two met while working in the field of mental health and substance use recovery in Victoria. 🐾



## People in the News

■ **Joe Freels** and **Tamara Ranalli, BA, PhD**, were appointed leaders at Neogen Corporation, a global pioneer in the food safety, livestock, and pet health & wellness markets. Freels was named senior vice president and chief commercial officer, and Dr. Ranalli was appointed senior vice-president and general manager of global food safety. Both leaders bring extensive experience from their previous roles in the diagnostics and healthcare sectors. Freels brings over 20 years of experience in diagnostics, life sciences, and healthcare to his role. Before joining Neogen, he served as senior vice-president of global commercial operations at Cepheid. Previously, Ranalli was senior vice-president and general manager at QuidelOrtho, overseeing the company's molecular diagnostics and point-of-care business units.



Joe Freels



Tammi Ranalli

Photos courtesy of Neogen Corporation

■ **Louise Kelly, DVM**, of Chatham, Ont., has been elected president of the College of Veterinarians of Ontario for 2026. Dr. Kelly will lead the organization's Legacy Council, which oversees ongoing regulatory work, while working with the Transition Council tasked with establishing the new body. A graduate of the Ontario Veterinary College in 2001, Kelly currently works as a locum veterinarian providing companion animal care across Ontario and has previously practised mixed animal medicine focused on dairy cattle. She was elected to College Council in 2022 and has served on the Complaints, Registration, and Executive committees.



Louise Kelly

Photo courtesy of College of Veterinarians of Ontario

■ **Michael Erickson, B.Sc., PhD**, was named IDEXX Laboratories, Inc. president and chief executive officer, effective May 12, 2026. With nearly 20 years of significant leadership experience in the healthcare industry, Dr. Erickson has been a key contributor to advancing IDEXX's mission to improve pet healthcare through innovative solutions. Erickson joined IDEXX in 2011 and has held various senior leadership roles across essential business divisions, including diagnostics, software, strategy, and corporate accounts. 🐾



Michael Erickson

Photo courtesy of Michael Erickson



Photo courtesy of UBC Faculty of Land and Food Systems

■ **Marina von Keyserlingk, B.Sc., M.Sc., PhD**, was named to the Order of Canada on Dec. 31, 2025 for decades of research advancing animal welfare. Throughout her career, von Keyserlingk and her students have published over 350 peer-reviewed papers. Their findings have shaped policies and practices worldwide. Her research extends beyond animal care to include social science, examining public attitudes toward animals. 🐾

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1. Segarra S, Sanmiguel D, Zuriaga E, et al. Sphingomyelin-rich lipid extract collar for canine atopic dermatitis. *Vet Sci.* 2023;10(6):389.



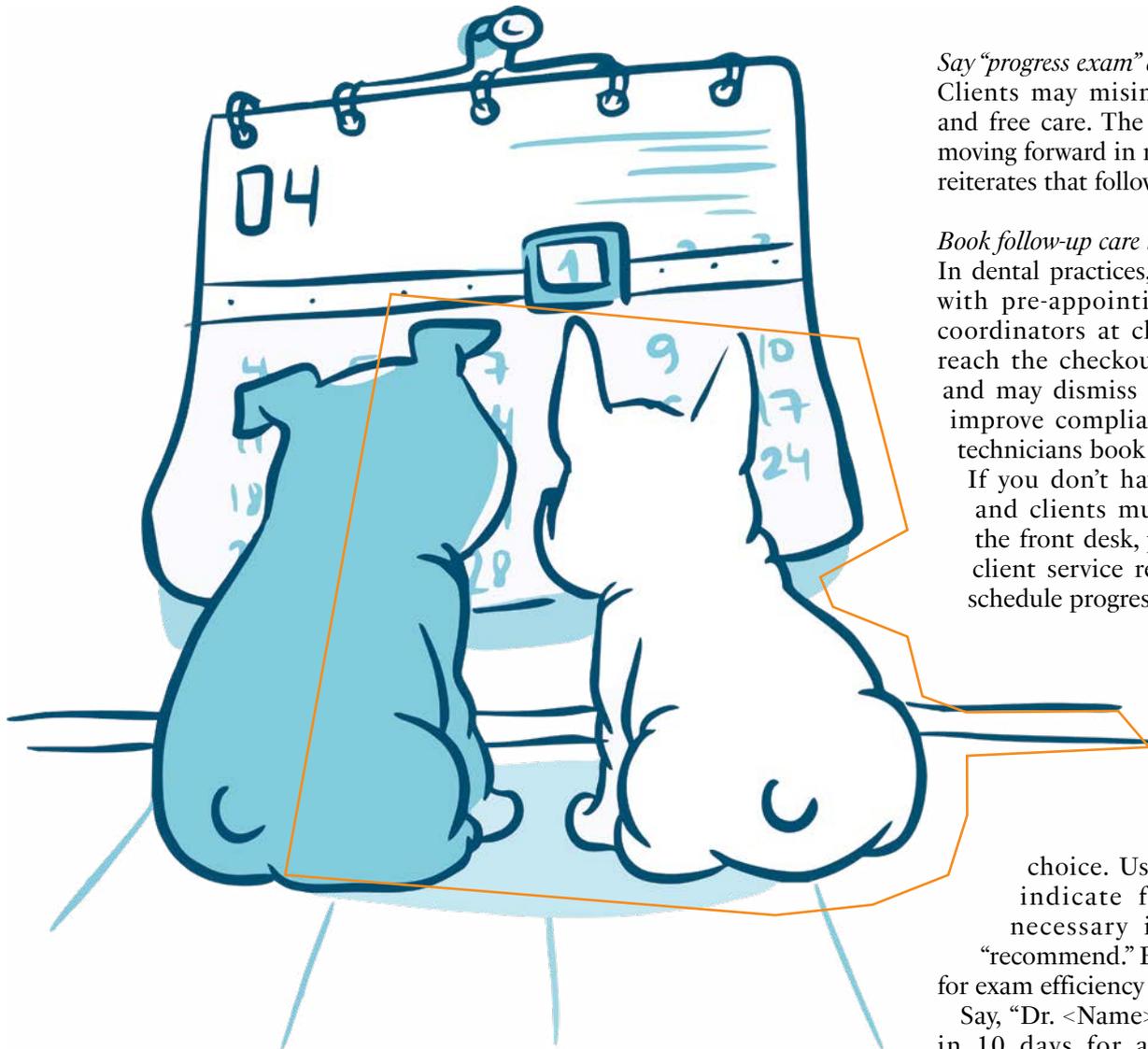
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# Four ways to fill your schedule



## *Say “progress exam” and never “recheck”*

Clients may misinterpret “recheck” as optional and free care. The word “progress” shows you are moving forward in resolving the health concern and reiterates that follow-up care is medically necessary.

## *Book follow-up care in exam rooms*

In dental practices, hygienists have greater success with pre-appointing patients than scheduling coordinators at checkout.<sup>4</sup> By the time clients reach the checkout counter, they want to leave and may dismiss staff attempts to schedule. To improve compliance with follow-up care, have technicians book progress exams in exam rooms. If you don’t have computers in exam rooms and clients must schedule appointments at the front desk, put alerts in patient records so client service representatives (CSRs) know to schedule progress exams.

## *Lead clients to schedule*

Pick the same weekday and time or use the yes-or-yes technique when booking follow-up care. Share benefit statements, such as getting the first appointment choice. Use the action word “needs” to indicate follow-up care is medically necessary instead of the wiggle word “recommend.” Book with the same veterinarian for exam efficiency and continuity of care.

Say, “Dr. <Name> needs to see <patient name> in 10 days for a progress exam for the ear infection. Does this same time on <date> fit your schedule?” Another opportunity is the yes-or-yes approach. Say, “Dr. <Name> has progress exams available on <date, time 1> or <date, time 2>. Which do you prefer?”

## *Contact clients who don’t book*

Enter a medical callback or automated text. In this ear infection scenario, call the client or send a text three days later, when seven days remain before follow-up care is due, to ensure appointment availability (Figure 1).

## **2) Offer online booking—especially for new clients**

New clients account for eight per cent of practice revenue, but were reportedly down 8.6 per cent in 2024.<sup>5</sup> Offering online scheduling is a key strategy to attract new clients. Veterinary practices’ utilization of online booking grew 87 per cent in 2025.<sup>6</sup> New clients made 23 per cent of online appointment bookings, and 37 per cent of all online appointments were scheduled after business hours.



### **BUSINESS BUILDER**

By Wendy S. Myers, CVJ

**T**he 2026 economic outlook for veterinary practices is concerning, with visits, client numbers, and revenue trending downward.<sup>1</sup> Veterinary appointments reportedly declined by 2.8 per cent during the last 12 months.<sup>2</sup>

Because full schedules ensure healthy profits, experts advise aiming for an appointment fill rate of 85 per cent.<sup>3</sup> Exceeding 90 per cent capacity could lead to less same-day appointment availability for sick patients, new clients being turned away, and increased risk of team burnout. Fill rates below 80 per cent will hurt profits and limit employee wages. To calculate your appointment fill rate, take the number of appointments seen divided by the number of available appointments.

If your appointment fill rate drops below 85 per cent, use these four strategies to fill empty slots:

### **1) Schedule progress exams at the end of visits**

When acute issues, chronic diseases, or procedures require follow-up care, schedule progress exams as you wrap up each appointment. You will have more appointment availability and ensure timely care.

### Millennials have digital-first preferences

As the largest segment of pet owners (33 per cent), millennials overwhelmingly prefer online scheduling and forms.<sup>7</sup> As the first generation to grow up with the internet, they find digital tools more convenient and efficient than traditional methods like phone calls and paper forms.

### Send confirmations with digital forms upon booking

Your client communications platform can automatically send text and email confirmations with new client forms. This lets you set up the medical record and request records from a previous veterinarian or adoption paperwork in advance.

### Enjoy faster check-ins

New clients can share patient details, including breed, birthdate, vaccine status, reproductive status, and more, through online forms—avoiding paperwork that could take up to 15 minutes during the appointment.

## 3) Move patients up to fill openings

Shifting patients up in the schedule to fill empty slots is known as “schedule optimization.” This strategy improves efficiency, resulting in fewer schedule gaps and more consistent patient flow. A veterinarian saw an average of 15 patients per day in 2024.<sup>1</sup> Let’s say the doctor has seven empty slots on Tuesday. Look for sick pet appointments on Wednesday and Thursday that could be rescheduled for Tuesday. This fills empty slots, prioritizes scheduling for ill patients, and enhances client satisfaction.

Keep a wait list of clients who want to be seen sooner. Fill cancellations or no-shows from your wait list. Text will be the fastest way to reach clients about newly available appointments.

## 4) Forward book wellness appointments

Wellness appointments account for 24 per cent of visits and are falling behind 2.9 per cent.<sup>9</sup> When a client visits for a pet’s wellness appointment, book the next care six or 12 months in advance, filling your future schedule. An American Animal Hospital Association (AAHA) report found that increasing forward booking appointments from five per cent to 10 per cent could grow revenue by three per cent.<sup>10</sup>

### Build your schedule 12 to 18 months out

Don’t worry if veterinarians’ schedules change. Doctors will request time off in advance for vacation and conferences, especially when booking travel. Simply contact clients with forward-booked appointments that need to be moved.

### Pre-block wellness appointments

In my online course on Scheduling Mastery (<https://csvets.info/SchedulingMastery>), I teach how to pre-block four wellness appointments in each doctor’s daily schedule. These wellness appointments are strategically placed as the first appointment of the day, before lunch, after lunch, and the last appointment

Figure 1

**Follow Up When Clients Don't Book Progress Exams**

Send this text:

- ✓ Use the doctor's name
- ✓ Give due date for follow-up care
- ✓ Use benefit statement to book now
- ✓ Share link and button to book online
- ✓ Raise response rates with buttons

Dr. <Name> needs to see <pet name> for a progress exam in 7 days. Don't wait—timely care can make a difference. Book now to get your first choice of appointment time and date. [Click here](#) to book online or call [555-555-5555](tel:555-555-5555).

Please select a button:

- Book online now
- Call to schedule
- Remind me later

Graphic courtesy of Wendy S. Myers, CVJ, Communication Solutions for Veterinarians

of the day. These wellness pre-blocks help keep your schedule on time and ensure your team goes home at closing time, reducing overtime and stress.

### Lead clients to forward book

Say, “Just as your dentist has you schedule your next appointment at checkout, we do the same to proactively manage your pet’s health. By scheduling today, you will get your first choice of doctor, date, and time. Dr. <Name> can see your pet on <date, time 1> or <date, time 2>. Which do you prefer?”

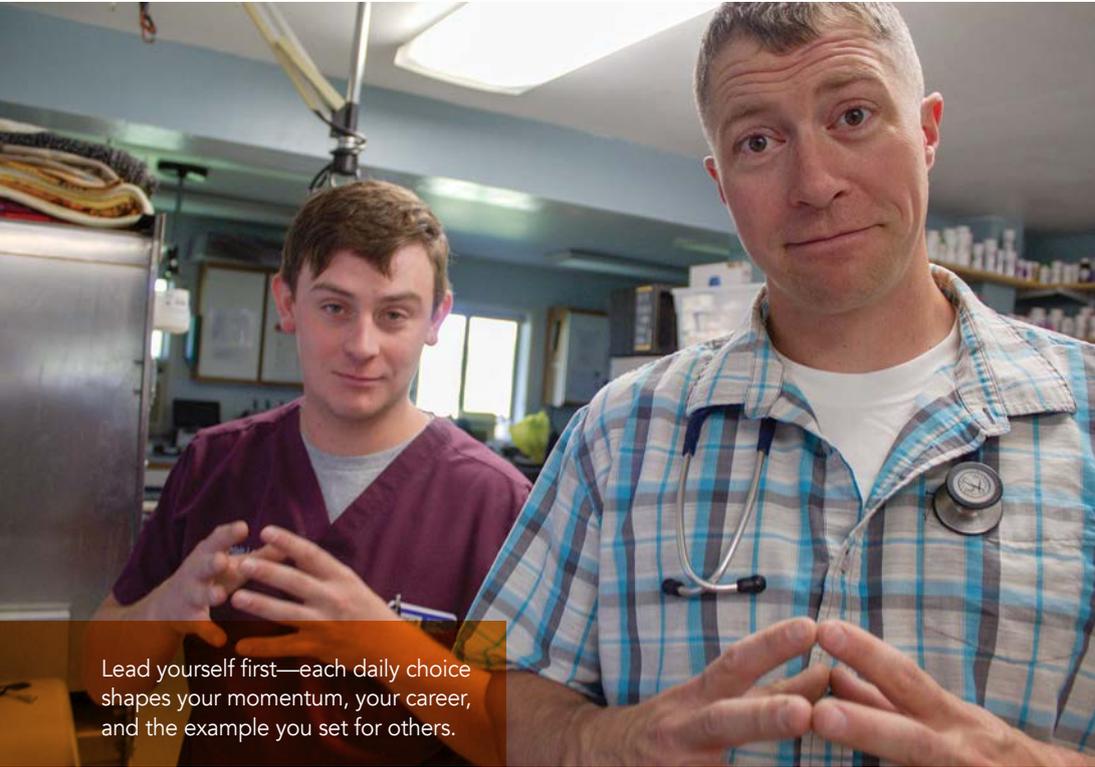
Have your hospital manager track appointment fill rates monthly. Adjust the schedule to respond to trends, such as adding more urgent care pre-blocks during busy summer months. Knowing fill rates also lets you tweak staffing levels and identify whether it is time to hire another veterinarian to meet appointment demands. 🐾

Wendy S. Myers, CVJ, trains veterinary teams to communicate with clarity and confidence, inspiring client trust and better medical care. Founder of Communication Solutions for Veterinarians, she teaches proven skills through online courses, conferences, and consulting. Myers’ experience as a partner in a specialty and emergency hospital gives her insight into practice challenges. Explore her online training at [CsvetsCourses.com](https://CsvetsCourses.com).

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View references for this article at [veterinarypracticenews.ca/4-ways-to-fill-your-schedule](https://veterinarypracticenews.ca/4-ways-to-fill-your-schedule).

# Leading in your day and career



Lead yourself first—each daily choice shapes your momentum, your career, and the example you set for others.

By Rebecca Rose, RVT, CCC, CPEP

Photos courtesy Rebecca Rose

**L**eadership is not a single event—it’s a practice you live out moment by moment. The way you support and encourage in the morning may not be the same as how you inspire in the afternoon. As a veterinary professional, your leadership shows up in the way you prepare for the day, the way you handle challenges, and how you intentionally build your career.

This article explores the daily habits and long-term practices that ignite each day and fuel growth in your veterinary career, regardless of your title or position.

## Leadership begins with you

Where does a veterinary team member or circumstance become leading or leadership? Who leads and who follows?

The truth is, leadership begins with you—today, in this time, in this very moment. Everyone leads in their day. You are the director of your daily destiny, and you alone are responsible for your outcomes.

Similar to the accountability question we pondered in a previous column in *Veterinary Practice News*,<sup>1</sup> leadership and accountability begin with you. Look in the mirror. A mirror reflecting individual leadership and accountability.

## Know thyself: The foundation of leadership

Self-awareness is essential. Most people don’t stop to reflect when life is smooth—it’s during challenges that we pause, reassess, and grow. Ask yourself these questions:

- Do I recognize that my life and career are in my hands alone?
- Who is responsible for my happiness and success?
- What do I want in my life and career?
- What steps am I taking to achieve those goals?
- What habits are holding me back?

You can’t lead others well if you don’t understand yourself. Growth in leadership begins with honest reflection.

## Morning: Setting the tone for success

Picture this: the surgery room is prepped, records updated, and the team is ready. You’re confident the morning will go smoothly—until the veterinarian walks in stressed and irritable. The energy shifts instantly.

Moments like this reveal why morning preparation matters. By grounding yourself early, you carry calm and composure into the workplace, no matter what unfolds. Try and develop these four habits for a successful morning:

- 1) Rise early. Give yourself space to start the day calmly.
- 2) Eat well. A balanced meal stabilizes your energy.
- 3) Move your body. Even 15 minutes of stretching or walking sharpens your focus.
- 4) Visualize. Picture yourself handling the day’s tasks with confidence.

Leadership takeaway: A steady morning routine makes you resilient when challenges appear.

## Staying steady when others aren’t

Every team member knows what it’s like to work alongside someone who had a rough start. Perhaps the veterinarian skipped breakfast and rushed in frazzled, or a coworker is distracted after dropping their child off at school following a quick tiff.

In these moments, you have a choice: Get pulled into their stress or model empathy and steadiness. Check out four ways to stay grounded:

- 1) Maintain composure. Don’t let their stress derail your mood.
- 2) Don’t take it personally. Their emotions are not about you.
- 3) Show empathy. Listen and acknowledge without needing to “fix.”
- 4) Take accountability. If you contributed to the issue, own it and correct it.

Example: Acknowledge a veterinarian’s stressful morning, empathize with her, and then redirect the focus toward the prepared schedule. That shift can reset the tone for the whole team.

## Afternoon: Recharge, regroup, reset

By midday, even the strongest leaders feel their energy dip. That’s why lunch breaks matter—not just for health, but as an act of leadership.

I once spoke with a veterinarian who skipped lunch every day because she felt “too busy.” Her team begged her to take a break, said they had her back, but she resisted. When I explained she was modelling unsustainable habits, she teared up. She realized leadership meant accepting the gift her team was offering.

Here are four benefits of taking a lunch break:

- 1) Nourishment. Fuel your body with healthy food choices.
- 2) Focus. Even 15 minutes away boosts concentration.



The way you support and encourage in the morning may not be how you inspire in the afternoon. Take much-needed breaks to recharge so you can model balance and sustainability to your team.

- 3) Mindfulness. Eat quietly—without interruptions—as a form of meditation.
- 4) Exercise. A brisk walk or light workout rejuvenates body and mind.

Leadership takeaway: By taking breaks, you model balance and sustainability for your team.

### Your career is in your hands

Leadership does not end with your shift—it extends into how you intentionally grow your career. Rarely will a manager say, “My top priority is advancing your career.” That responsibility belongs to you. Explore the following ways to help lead in your career:

- Write out your career roadmap.
- Seek mentorship.
- Network at CE events and professional gatherings.
- Share your career goals with your manager.
- Surround yourself with positive peers.
- Engage a career coach.

Leadership takeaway: Create your own opportunities. Don't wait for someone else to design your future.

### Final thoughts: Leadership as a daily choice

Your day and career are in your hands. Leadership is not reserved for managers—it is a daily choice available to everyone. From how you start your morning to how you regroup at lunch, to the way you shape your long-term career, each decision builds momentum.

Lead yourself first. Hold yourself accountable to your leadership. By doing so, you become the example that inspires others to follow.

So today, ask yourself: How will I choose to lead? How will I choose to show up and lead my day? 🐾

Rebecca Rose, RVT, CCC (certified career coach), CPEP (certified peaceful euthanasia professional), has a diverse background serving the veterinary community as a credentialed team member and leader, with more than 38 years of experience. Rose has worked in and managed veterinary clinics, collaborates with industry partners, authors articles and books, and facilitates engaging team workshops.

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# A framework for empowering pet parents and fostering open dialogue

By Courtney A. Campbell, DVM, DACVS-SA

Photos courtesy Dr. Courtney A. Campbell

**T**he bond we share with our pets is immeasurable, bringing joy, companionship, and unconditional love into our lives. As veterinarians, we are privileged to be the stewards of this bond, entrusted with the health and well-being of our patients. However, a growing challenge looms large in our profession: the rising cost of veterinary care and the subsequent stress it places on pet parents. This is not just a financial burden—it may create a barrier to optimal care, leading to difficult conversations and, at times, heartbreaking decisions.

It was this very challenge that led me to develop the “Three Cs” framework: Choice, Continuity, and Critical Care. My goal was to develop a practical and empathetic approach that helps pet parents feel more prepared and confident in navigating the financial aspects of pet ownership, ultimately

enabling them to make the best possible care decisions in a multi-species household.

## The lifetime of costs: Understanding the financial reality

Let’s be honest, pet ownership comes with a significant financial commitment. While the initial expenses, such as adoption fees or buying pet food, may seem manageable, the true costs unfold over the pet’s lifetime. This includes routine vaccinations, annual wellness exams, parasite prevention, and providing high-quality nutrition. These are not just expenses—they are the foundational elements of preventive care that keep pets healthy, happy, and by their owners’ side for many years to come. Understanding and planning for these ongoing costs is key to being the best advocate for your furry family members.

Findings from Synchrony's 2025 Pet Lifetime of Care Study highlight a significant disconnect between pet parents' perceptions and the actual financial realities.<sup>1</sup> The study reveals nearly eight out of 10 pet parents underestimate the true cost of care. For instance, caring for a dog over 15 years can cost \$60,602, while caring for a cat over the same period can reach \$47,106. Even small companion animals, over a six-year lifespan, can incur costs of up to \$14,938. These figures underscore the critical importance of comprehensive financial planning for pet parents.

These figures are not driven solely by routine care—they also encompass the unexpected. A sudden illness, an accidental injury, or the diagnosis of a chronic condition can rapidly escalate veterinary bills into the thousands. Emergency surgeries, specialized treatments, advanced diagnostics—these are the realities that can catch even the most prepared pet parent off guard. Without a clear understanding of these potential costs and a proactive financial plan, these moments of crisis can quickly turn into profound emotional stress and financial strain. As a veterinarian, I have seen how preparing ahead can make all the difference in navigating these difficult times with confidence and compassion.

It's crucial to guide pet parents and help them recognize that planning for both the expected and unexpected is a necessity for responsible pet ownership.

### Breaking the stigma: Open conversations about finances

One of the most challenging aspects of my practice has been witnessing the stigma and fear many clients experience when discussing finances. I have seen the hesitation in their eyes, the reluctance to ask about costs, and heard the stories of despair when they are faced with a treatment plan they believe they cannot afford. This fear often stems from a societal discomfort with discussing money, coupled with a deep-seated guilt that they might be perceived as not loving their pet enough if they cannot afford every recommended procedure.

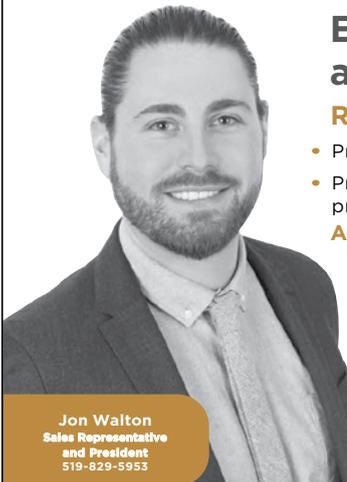
This dynamic creates a significant barrier in the exam room. When clients are hesitant to disclose their financial limitations, veterinarians are left to



guess, potentially recommending treatments that are out of reach or not offering the full spectrum of care due to an unspoken assumption of financial constraint. This lack of transparency can erode trust and prevent us from truly partnering with pet parents to find the best solutions.

My personal experience has shown me that when veterinary professionals initiate these conversations with empathy and without judgment, we can transform a potentially awkward discussion into a collaborative effort to prioritize care. This occurs because empathy validates the client's feelings of stress or guilt, creating a safe space where they feel understood rather than scrutinized.

Emphasize the importance of preventive care to clients, reminding them that this step can often mitigate the need for more expensive, emergency interventions in the future.



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“My goal was to develop a practical and empathetic approach that helps pet parents feel more prepared and confident in navigating the financial aspects of pet ownership, ultimately enabling them to make the best possible care decisions in a multi-species household.”

### A deeper dive into the Cs: An approach to empowering pet parents

The Three Cs framework is designed to provide a structured yet flexible approach to financial preparedness and care planning.

#### *Choice: The importance of financial preparedness and tools for urgent moments*

The first “C” stands for Choice. This principle emphasizes the crucial need for pet parents to have options—the ability to choose the best possible care for their beloved companion, rather than being limited by immediate out-of-pocket expenses. It empowers them to pursue advanced diagnostics, specialized treatments, or alternative therapies that might otherwise feel out of reach. However, choice is not just about having unlimited finances—it is about cultivating financial resilience and preparedness. It is about having the foresight and resources in place to make the best decisions about your pet’s health outcomes.

A part of financial preparedness is discussing various financial tools available to pet parents. Pet insurance, for example, can be a game-changer, covering a significant portion of unexpected veterinary costs. My team guides clients through understanding different policy types, deductibles, and reimbursement rates, helping them select a plan that aligns with their budget and their pet’s needs. Beyond insurance, we explore options, such as dedicated savings accounts for pet emergencies, flexible financing solutions for veterinary services, and even community resources or charitable organizations that offer assistance.

Empowering pet parents with the knowledge and resources allows them to consider all viable treatment paths, ensuring their pet receives the best possible care without undue financial stress.

#### *Continuity: Creating a care roadmap and budgeting for recurring needs*

The second “C” is Continuity, focusing on the ongoing, proactive management of a pet’s health. This involves establishing a long-term care roadmap with a trusted veterinarian and budgeting for recurring needs. Continuity of care is paramount for preventive health and early detection of issues.

I advise clients to develop a personalized wellness plan for their pet, outlining routine check-ups, vaccinations, dental care, and age-appropriate screenings. This is not just a list of services—it is a conversation about their pet’s specific breed, age, lifestyle, and potential predispositions to certain conditions. By creating this roadmap, pet parents gain a clear understanding of the expected annual costs. We then discuss practical budgeting strategies, such as setting aside a small amount monthly for routine care or utilizing wellness plans offered by some veterinary practices.

An emphasis on preventative care can often mitigate the need for more expensive, emergency interventions down the line. A strong, trusting relationship with their veterinarian is the cornerstone of continuity, allowing for open dialogue about health goals and financial realities.

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Without honest financial conversations, it can become challenging for veterinarians to recommend a workable treatment plan, weakening trust and limiting care options.

### **Critical care: Planning ahead for emergencies and treatment options**

Finally, the third “C” is Critical Care. This addresses the inevitable reality of emergencies and serious illnesses. While we hope our pets never face such situations, planning ahead is crucial. This involves discussing potential emergency scenarios and knowing where to go for treatment.

I regularly discuss with clients the typical costs associated with common emergencies, such as foreign body ingestion, trauma, or sudden onset illnesses. This is not meant to instill fear, but rather to foster realistic expectations and encourage preparedness.

By having these conversations proactively, pet parents can make informed decisions under pressure, knowing they have considered their options and understood the financial implications. This preparation can significantly reduce stress during a crisis and ensure timely, life-saving interventions for their pet.

### **Why the Cs matter**

The Three Cs framework is more than just a financial guide—it is a philosophy aimed at transforming the veterinary-client relationship and, by extension, the landscape of pet healthcare. This approach helps in several ways:

1) *It empowers pet parents to be proactive in their pet’s health care needs.* When pet parents understand the financial realities and have tools to plan, they move from a reactive stance to a proactive one. This proactivity can lead to earlier detection of health issues, consistent preventative care, and ultimately, healthier, longer lives for pets.

2) *It ensures pet parents are informed about care plan options, enabling more tailored approaches that fit suggested care plans and pet parents’ budgets.* No two pets, or pet parents, are alike. The Three Cs framework emphasizes a collaborative approach between the veterinarian and the family to customize care plans that meet the pet’s medical needs while respecting the pet parent’s budget,

fostering a sense of partnership rather than a prescriptive dynamic.

3) *It breaks stigmas around financial conversations,* allowing for more open dialogue in exam rooms, which in turn helps veterinarians to build stronger relationships with their clients. Pet parents ultimately feel heard, understood, and supported, rather than judged. This open dialogue not only leads to better medical decisions but also strengthens the bond between veterinarians and clients, creating a true partnership in the lifelong journey of pet care.

The Three Cs offer a robust framework for navigating the complexities of pet healthcare costs. By embracing this approach, we can empower pet parents, optimize care outcomes, and foster a more transparent, trusting, and healthier community for all pets and their owners, ultimately deepening the human-animal bond. 🐾

*Courtney A. Campbell, DVM, DACVS-SA, a board-certified veterinary surgeon, author, and TV veterinary medical correspondent, enjoys the beautiful triumvirate of the family-patient-doctor relationship. He founded Stitches Veterinary Surgery in Long Beach, Calif. Dr. Campbell marries his love for healing animals with his dedication to “edutainment.” Campbell has partnered with Synchrony’s CareCredit to help empower pet parents with the knowledge and resources that help enable them to ensure their pet receives the best possible care without undue financial stress.*

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# Kinesiology taping -does it work? If so, how?

KT consists of thin, flexible, and “breathable” tape that stretches to allow for movement and, as a result, sensory stimulation. This differs from rigid athletic tape (AT) that limits motion and inhibits neuronal excitation.

For humans, KT attaches directly to skin, much like an adhesive bandage. In contrast, veterinary kinesiology tape (VKT) is applied to areas that usually have some amount of fur between the skin and tape, making it harder to stay in place. Some manufacturers of VKT have addressed this concern by opting for thicker material with a stronger, medical-grade adhesive, offering more support and stability. To discourage chewing and ingestion, VKT may have a bitter or unpleasant flavour.

Taping patterns in swirling, crisscrossed, and circular arrangements suggest a rational and clinical intent designed to deliver a specific outcome. In the accompanying images, we see “anchored” Hestaband (a type of VKT) above and below longitudinal tapes over a dog’s tarsus (Figure 1). In Figure 2, Hestaband supports and comforts a dog’s lumbosacral region. Figures 3 and 4 illustrate equine taping methods, showing, respectively, VKT (Hestaband Satin) for a foal with limb issues and Hestaband Lymph on an adult recovering from trauma to the pelvic limb resulting in swelling and bruising.

## Research considerations

A common criticism of taping techniques pertains to the lack of consistent guidelines and basic standards.<sup>3</sup> Determining “best practices” and testing those against other forms of care could dramatically improve the quality and reliability of KT research.

That said, it is nearly impossible to design an inert and convincing sham intervention for physical treatment modalities in the awake patient. That is, placebo surgery would typically require a skin incision. Massage, by definition, makes physical contact with the patient. Similarly, any form of “fake” acupuncture that the patient feels impacts the nervous system.

As Kaptchuk et al. wrote, “[S]ham acupuncture is not inert or innocuous. And indeed, most methods of sham acupuncture have somatosensory properties and stimulate mechanoreceptors. Touching the skin anywhere induces a certain amount of sensory stimulation and thereby a possible therapeutic effect.”<sup>4</sup>

Uncertainties and methodological challenges aside, positive findings have emerged that support



### EVIDENCE-BASED MEDICINE

By Narda G. Robinson,  
DO, DVM, MS, FAAMA

Photos courtesy Christa Veinotte,  
owner of Hestaband

**A**s the field of sports medicine and rehabilitation evolves and expands, more of us are recognizing the value of trying non-invasive modalities first, rather than rushing to surgery, for a range of orthopedic problems and mobility disorders.

One of the approaches currently gaining traction is kinesiology taping (KT), a hard-to-miss technique for humans and animals, with its bold colours and intriguing patterns. When audiences see KT worn by human athletes at the Olympics, it surges in popularity. Nonetheless, many skeptics dismiss it as “placebo”<sup>1</sup> or “pseudoscience.”<sup>2</sup> Fortunately, proponents remain undeterred, citing more and better research that elucidates its mechanisms of action and clinical value.

the premise and purported mechanisms of KT for a multitude of conditions:

- “Current evidence suggested that kinesiology taping could be recommended to improve upper limb function in patients with stroke in pain intensity, shoulder subluxation, general disability, upper extremity function, and the PROM of flexion.”<sup>5</sup>
- “We conclude that ankle balance taping that uses kinesiology tape instantly increased the walking ability of amateur soccer players with lateral ankle sprain. Therefore, ankle balance taping is a useful alternative to prevent and treat ankle sprain of soccer players.”<sup>6</sup>
- “The meta-analysis showed a significant improvement in gait functions (step velocity, step and stride length and reduction in the base of support in dynamics), reduction in the joint range of motion in inversion and eversion, decrease in the muscle activation of the long peroneus and decrease in the postural sway in movement in the mid-lateral direction. It is possible to conclude that KT provides a moderate stabilising (sic) effect on the ankles of the athletes of most popular contact sports with chronic ankle instability.”<sup>7</sup>

Other human conditions showing the value of KT include plantar fasciitis,<sup>8</sup> hemiplegic shoulder subluxation,<sup>9</sup> postoperative dental pain,<sup>10</sup> quadriceps muscle strength,<sup>11</sup> and low back pain.<sup>12</sup> Patients may experience a variety of benefits following anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) reconstruction, such as pain reduction,<sup>13</sup> faster improvement of range of motion, resolution of edema, and increased thigh circumference.<sup>14</sup> For patients with complete ACL rupture and no surgery, those receiving KT showed greater static stability,<sup>15</sup> proprioception, strength,<sup>16</sup> and functional performance.<sup>17</sup>

VKT studies are growing in number, too. For horses, the application of KT to the abdominal musculature increased longitudinal activity at the trot<sup>18</sup> and reduced signs of thoracolumbar epaxial pain.<sup>19</sup> VKT was superior to rigid taping in improving gait and weight transfer in dogs.<sup>20</sup>

As Christa Veinotte,<sup>21</sup> the owner and CEO of Hestaband, noted, “Kinesiology taping has become an invaluable tool in veterinary rehabilitation— not just for performance, but for comfort and recovery. It was inevitable that taping would move from human athletics into animal therapy, but it’s rare to see it go the other way. That’s what makes Hestaband unique—we started in the equine and canine world, and now our work with Acadia University is taking those insights back into human research.”

### Mechanisms of KT

Delving more into the mechanisms, we find that the benefits of KT fall into three main categories: facilitated blood<sup>22</sup> and lymphatic fluid flow, mechanoreceptor-driven analgesia, and strengthened muscles and joints.

When sufficiently adherent to skin or fur, KT lifts the general “gmish” of what’s beneath the surface, giving more space for vessels, nerves, and

Figure 1



Learn about the history of Hestaband and how kinesiology taping techniques work to aid the performance, recovery, and lymphatic support in animals: <https://youtu.be/7Irl69XQXIM?si=U4yIEPN1x8pn8O2>

This image illustrates Hestaband on a canine hock. This supports and stabilizes the joint to prevent reinjury and can be used while awaiting an orthopedic brace.

Figure 2



This photo shows Hestaband applied over the lumbosacral junction of a dog. Taping provides pelvic support for senior dogs as well as those with hip dysplasia or even mild arthritic changes.

Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 3: This image shows a foal wearing Hestaband Satin. This tape was originally developed for foal deformities, used to assist with ligament laxities, contractures, and windswept foals.

Figure 4: This horse has Hestaband Lymph over the stifle and hamstring areas. Tape is applied to increase circulation, decrease swelling, and help reduce bruising after receiving a kick from a pasture mate.

lymphatic channels to function adequately. How does this help? Tissues traumatized by injury, surgery, and chronic inflammation may compress local vasculature due to concomitant edema, muscle tension, and fascial restriction. Circulation of blood and lymph slows, setting the stage for inadequate oxygenation, carbon dioxide buildup, tissue acidosis, and the detrimental accumulation of metabolic end products.

Nerves affected by ongoing pressure and oxygen reduction turn to inefficient anaerobic glycolysis for day-to-day energy (ATP) needs. Longstanding energy deficits disrupt the function of sensory, motor, and autonomic nerves, leading to numbness, tingling, weakness, cramping, and thermoregulatory dysfunction. This is where KT comes in—its lifting aspects give nerves room to breathe, impelling fluids to flow and pain to subside. Moreover, when KT activates skin mechanoreceptors, it bolsters endogenous analgesic processes in the brain and spinal cord.

Unhappy nerves may also weaken muscles and destabilize joints. Muscles assist ligaments in preserving the mechanical integrity of arthroal structures through balanced activation, which resists forces and excessive displacement.

By stimulating somatic afferent fibres in skin, muscles, and across joints, KT cultivates a more normal level of communication throughout the sensorimotor system.<sup>23</sup> KT's value in rehabilitation medicine is not about structurally supporting joints by limiting motion as athletic tape would do, but rather by physiologically bolstering innate processes that make motor control over joint integrity effective and meaningfully protective. Left

uncorrected, impaired reflexes have less ability to prevent repeated microtrauma and, ultimately, joint destruction. Thus, KT's value in the rehabilitation setting is less about limiting movement and more about bolstering innate injury-preventing processes.

From the larger perspective, with all the ways in which integrative rehabilitation and physical medicine measures—such as VKT—reduce pain, improve function, and support resolution of edema and circulatory compromise, why does our profession all too often fast-track animals to surgery when safer measures exist? The side effects, pain, cost, and trauma from VKT and other rehabilitation modalities are negligible in comparison. Plus, VKT has not been implicated in possibly raising the risk of osteosarcoma, unlike certain surgical procedures, such as the TPLO.<sup>24</sup> 🐾

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# The chevron lucency

By John R. Lewis, VMD, FAVD, DAVDC

Interpreting dental radiographs in dogs and cats can be challenging, particularly when assessing teeth for possible endodontic disease. The classic radiographic signs of endodontic disease include: 1) a wider than normal root canal, 2) periapical resorption and/or internal resorption of the root and 3) lucency of the bone surrounding the root apex, a.k.a. “periapical lucency.”

## 1) A wide canal

A wider-than-normal root canal is a reliable and specific sign of an endodontically diseased tooth, but the sensitivity of this finding is low, because it takes a long time for an endodontically diseased tooth to show evidence of this radiographic sign.

Think of a tooth as a tree, except the rings of the tree are laid down internally. The diameter of the tooth does not change, but the width of the canal gets narrower over time as a vital, living tooth continues to age. The hard tissue, dentin, is produced throughout the life of the tooth by cells lining the pulp called odontoblasts. Odontoblasts produce primary dentin when the tooth is developing. Secondary dentin is produced after eruption and throughout the life of the tooth. Odontoblasts can even produce a reparative dentin (tertiary dentin) in response to wear of the tooth. If the cells within the pulp die due to endodontic disease, the lack of odontoblasts results in a cessation of maturation of the tooth and a wider canal than the contralateral tooth. It takes months for this discrepancy in canal width to be radiographically evident.

## 2) Tooth resorption

Resorption of the hard tissue of the root can occur in the area of the apical delta or anywhere within the canal as a result of infection and inflammation. When it occurs within the canal, internal resorption manifests radiographically as a focal widening of the canal, often in the mid-root area. When resorption occurs around the apex of the root, it results in an irregular surface of the normally smooth, dense hard tissue of the tooth root.

## 3) Periapical lucency

Periapical lucency can be evidence of periapical infection/inflammation. Normally, the apex of the root is surrounded by a narrow periodontal ligament space, which

is radiolucent on radiographs. Adjacent to the periodontal ligament space, there is a thin layer of radiodense bone called lamina dura. When infection becomes established in the apical portion of the root, the bone of the lamina dura is lost, resulting in a periapical lucency that is often wider than the diameter of the tip of the root. Though this appearance is often referred to as a “tooth root abscess,” in reality, an abscess is only one of the many possible reasons for a periapical lucency. Perhaps the most common cause of periapical lucency is a granuloma rather than a true abscess. Granulomas can sometimes be seen as a large ball of soft tissue attached to the root when extracting an endodontically diseased tooth (Figure 1). Periapical cysts can also cause a periapical lucency, but unlike abscesses or granulomas, a cyst often has a corticated border around the periapical lucency.

One of the most commonly mistaken normal variants that can mimic a pathologic periapical lucency is the chevron radiolucency. Frequently seen at the apices of maxillary incisors, canine teeth, and mandibular first molars of dogs, the chevron lucency represents trabecular bone and vascular channels rather than true periapical lysis.

Other normal jaw structures may appear on radiographs and mimic pathology. In the maxillary canine and premolar region in dogs, the junction of the vertical body of the maxilla with its palatine process and the maxillary conchal crest can mimic a cystic structure and interfere with evaluating apical structures. In the mandible, the canal and various mental foramina are normal radiolucent or radiopaque structures, depending on the angle and exposure.

## Normal variants vs. endodontic disease

How can we determine if a lucency is pathologic or anatomic? Sometimes, even for board-certified dentists who interpret dental radiographs daily, it can be difficult to determine.

Chevron lucencies usually extend apically at the same width of the apex instead of expanding beyond the dimensions of the apex, and are surrounded by a distinct periodontal ligament and lamina dura.

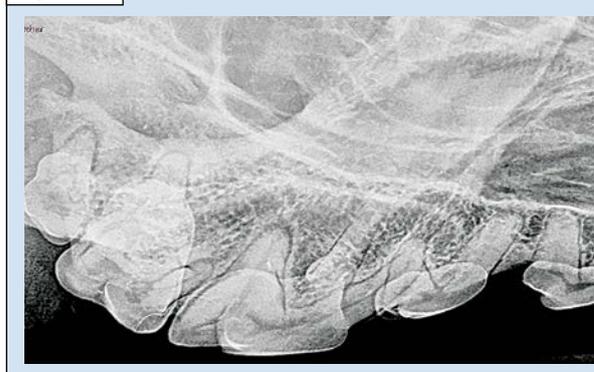
Normal anatomical variations often present with regular, well-defined margins. Pathologic changes, by contrast, tend to be mottled, irregular, or “moth-eaten” in character. Normal variants are typically

Figure 1



Granuloma at the root tip (apex) of an endodontically diseased molar.

Figure 2



Chevron lucencies seen at the distal root of tooth 108 and palatal root of 110. Note the lucency is not wider than the diameter of the root tip.

bilaterally symmetrical or follow predictable patterns related to jaw or tooth anatomy. Disease processes usually involve asymmetric destruction or expansion of bone or tooth structure.

Clinical clues matter. When trying to determine if radiographic findings are truly significant, evaluate for signs such as tooth abrasion, discoloration (intrinsic staining), fracture, pulp exposure, swelling over the roots, and draining tracts. Normal anatomical variants often occur in teeth that have no other signs of trauma. If there are no clinical signs of disease, consider monitoring the tooth with serial radiographs to look for changes over time, which will distinguish stable anatomical variants from progressive pathologies. 

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Photos courtesy Dr. John R. Lewis

# The fresh pet food movement

Trends, evidence, and veterinary perspectives



Homemade recipe ingredients with fish oil and vitamin/mineral supplement before blending.

By Laura Gaylord, DVM, DACVIM (Nutrition)

Photos courtesy Whole Pet Provisions, PLLC

When we visit our doctor, we are advised to eat fresh foods, include more fruits and vegetables in our diet, shop along the perimeter of the grocery store, and avoid processed foods whenever possible. The Mayo Clinic states that “fresh foods are generally healthier than the processed foods.”<sup>1</sup> Canada’s Food Guide emphasizes choosing a variety of nutritious foods each day, specifically vegetables and fruits, whole grain foods, and protein foods, that have little to no added sodium, free sugars, or saturated fat. It encourages making water your drink of choice and choosing plant-based proteins more often.<sup>2</sup>

Pet parents also hear this message as they increasingly view their pets as family members. Naturally, they wish to apply this advice to the entire family and are seeking fresh, refrigerated, and frozen pet foods.

Fresh pet food is the fastest-growing segment of the pet food market worldwide, according to the pet food industry. In the Packaged Facts report, *Canadian Pet*

*Market Survey, 4th Edition (2025)*, market analysts noted that while pet food retail sales in Canada reached \$6.7 billion in 2024, growth is increasingly driven by a “pet parent” mentality and interest in fresh or human-grade formulations.<sup>3,4</sup>

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, more pet owners have been working remotely and spending time at home bonding with their pets. Pet adoptions have increased, resulting in a higher demand for pet care and increased spending on pet food. Home cooking has become more prominent due to COVID-induced disruptions in supply chains, and the demand for veterinary nutritionists has increased over the past several years. Appointment offerings at university clinical nutrition services may take up to three months for the next available time slot. Recent data shared from an independent diet formulation service provided by veterinary nutritionists indicated a 100 per cent increase in monthly consult requests since 2019.<sup>5</sup>

Pet owner motivations for feeding fresh foods or less processed diets include feelings of inclusion of the pet as part of the family or culture, claims of nutritional

superiority, perception that they are on a more natural diet or one more similar to a wild-type diet.<sup>6-8</sup>

Recent surveys and published studies indicate that the humanization of pets is associated with a desire to feed healthy, high-quality diets that are less processed. One survey of 2,181 pet owners showed 87 per cent were highly bonded with their pet, and 53.1 per cent of pet owners reported giving the same or a higher priority (43.7 per cent) to purchasing healthy food for their pet rather than for themselves. Pet owners were reported to assess the ingredients, freshness, and healthfulness of a commercial pet food when deciding whether to purchase it.<sup>9</sup>

In veterinary practice, it is important to recognize pet owners’ motivations behind feeding fresh food, and practitioners can provide a balanced, unbiased perspective. Although fresh pet food remains a specialized segment, it is a key driver of market premiumization, with dog food maintaining the largest share at over 66 per cent of the total sector. This trend is expected to stimulate further product innovation in the cat food category,

which saw a 10 per cent compound annual growth rate leading into 2025.<sup>10</sup>

### Health benefits of fresh foods

There is currently a paucity of research evaluating the impacts of feeding different diets to dogs or cats throughout their lifetime. A few studies have examined short-term feeding periods and noted some observable differences between feeding less processed diets and more processed commercial kibble or canned diets. One study in kittens compared a commercial canned diet, a commercial raw diet, and a nutritionist-formulated, complete and balanced homemade raw diet for 10 weeks and found no differences in body condition score, weight, height, and length measurements, as well as no statistically significant differences in laboratory parameters. Both the commercial and homemade raw diets passed the Association of American Feed Control Officials (AAFCO) feeding trial criteria, with gains similar to those of the control commercial canned feed group. It was concluded the commercial raw or the homemade raw used in this growth feeding trial were both adequate for feeding growing kittens.<sup>11</sup> In several studies, the digestibility of less-processed diets compared to more processed commercial kibble or canned foods was found to be higher but the long-term effects of consuming a diet with higher digestibility on health, disease, and longevity of dogs and cats are unknown.<sup>4,11-15</sup>

Another study compared “health markers” in 27 dogs fed dry kibble diets to 28 dogs fed less-processed diets evaluating the pet management history, physical examination, complete blood count, urinalysis, and serum biochemistry. A blinded veterinary observer evaluated dental, ear, and coat scores to calculate and assign each dog a clinical composite score (CCS). CCS and coat scores were statistically better in the less-processed diet-fed dogs as compared to those fed more processed commercial kibble. Blood analytes differed between the dogs, with those on less-processed diets having higher platelet counts, higher BUN, 50 per cent lower serum alkaline phosphatase activity (ALP), and lower blood glucose concentrations.<sup>16</sup> It was unclear whether these differences were due to variations in macronutrient content or the effects of processing on the pet foods.

Another more recent year-long study evaluated serum metabolomic profiles in senior dogs fed a human-grade food or an extruded kibble and found higher branched chain amino metabolism, creatine,



Homemade recipe with ground turkey, whole egg, sweet potato, zucchini, and white rice.

carnosine, anserine, fatty acid metabolism, long chain n-3 fatty acids, lipolysis, and ketogenesis, and decreased advanced glycation end products, fatty acid synthesis, and creatinine in the human-grade fed group although macronutrient differences were noted between the diets.<sup>17</sup> Further research is needed to control differing diet macronutrient levels and to understand the long-term health effects of these differences.

### Understanding homemade diets

Home-prepared diets, which owners can learn about through various sources including the internet, pet magazines, and books written by veterinarians and non-veterinarians with varying levels of training in nutrition, are typically composed of either raw or cooked foods. A 2019 study found that the proportion of pets exclusively fed “conventional” diets (commercially available, heat-processed products, typically kibble or canned foods) decreased from 65 to 13 per cent in dogs, and from 85 to 32 per cent in cats, indicating that pet owners are increasingly interested in feeding their pets other food forms.<sup>18</sup> Studies examining the nutritional adequacy of home-prepared diets have reported potentially significant nutritional imbalances, however. A study evaluated 200 published home-prepared recipes for adult maintenance in dogs written by veterinarians (64.5 per cent) and non-veterinarians (35.5 per cent) and revealed at least one deficiency in an

essential nutrient, according to the National Research Council (NRC) or AAFCO guidelines in the majority of diets (95 per cent), while 83.5 per cent of recipes had multiple deficiencies.<sup>19</sup> Nutrients that have been noted most frequently to be absent in homemade diets include calcium, phosphorus, and vitamin D. Nutritional imbalances can result in secondary hyperparathyroidism with clinical signs including spontaneous fractures, muscle twitching, seizures, and limb deformities.<sup>20-22</sup>

Veterinarians should be comfortable discussing and evaluating homemade diets on a surface level. Discussion with pet owners about the risks or benefits of homemade cooked or raw diets is required and should be documented in the medical records.

Exposure to pathogens from food (E. coli, listeria, salmonella) with raw feeding is particularly a concern among elderly, young, pregnant, lactating, or immunocompromised pets and people. Pet owners should consult a board-certified veterinary nutritionist for guidance if they want to home-prepare any diet, whether cooked or raw. Your team can advise clients to find a board-certified veterinary nutritionist, diplomate ACVIM (Nutrition), who can formulate homemade diets for clients with referral.<sup>23</sup>

### Realities of fresh pet foods

Commercial fresh pet foods and homemade foods may be more costly to feed than

“In veterinary practice, it is important to recognize pet owners’ motivations behind feeding fresh food, and practitioners can provide a balanced, unbiased perspective.”



Homemade recipe with chicken white meat, oats, butternut squash, and mushrooms submitted by client.

commercial kibble and canned food options. One study in 2020 examined the cost of feeding different diet forms including dry kibble, canned, or homemade foods.<sup>24</sup>

Commercial dry foods in all categories (super premium, premium, and standard) presented lower costs versus wet foods and homemade diets. If additional “functional” ingredients are added to the foods, such as omega-3 fatty acids, glucosamine, or probiotics, this will increase the cost of the diet whether it is homemade or commercial.

Wet foods presented higher costs when compared to dry foods or homemade foods, which may be related to the higher inclusion of proteins and fats, or higher packaging and shipping costs. Proteins and fats are expensive ingredients in pet foods compared to less expensive carbohydrates. Additionally, wet foods contain at least 60 per cent moisture (some exceed 80 per cent), while dry kibble has an average of eight to 10 per cent, resulting in a lower energy density in wet foods. This increases the volume of food intake necessary to meet the daily calorie requirement, and it also increases packaging costs due to the necessity for smaller, individual pouches or cans, as well as higher shipping weights.

The costs involved in preparing a homemade diet will include the resources needed for the cooking process (water, energy, and heat (gas/electric), as well as the owner’s time spent shopping and preparing the food. Costs may also be incurred for storing ingredients and meals that require freezing or refrigeration. Ingredient selection will greatly impact the diet costs.



Close-up of homemade recipe ingredients with fish oil and vitamin/mineral supplement before blending.

In the 2020 study, it was noted that chicken-based homemade diets presented a lower cost than beef-based diets, with a difference of approximately 43 per cent. Similar to commercial foods, the protein source (type and amount) will influence the total expense, with exotic or difficult-to-source proteins significantly increasing the diet cost. Setting protein amounts in the homemade diet extremely high will also require a larger investment from the pet owner to prepare the diet. Supplementation of the diet with a high-quality, reliable vitamin-mineral supplement is mandatory for homemade diet preparation to achieve a balanced daily diet. The price of the supplement and shipping costs must practically be included in the cost of preparing a homemade diet.

Using a homemade diet in place of a therapeutic commercial diet will also

not save costs for most pet owners. For therapeutic diets, in general, the cost of homemade diets containing chicken breast was 15.18 per cent to 52.47 per cent higher than commercial foods, depending on the specific disease condition of the pet. Beef as the protein source will additionally increase the cost by 38.88 per cent to 100.69 per cent.<sup>25</sup>

Actual costs for feeding adult dogs at maintenance have been found to range from \$5.67 (US\$3.99) per 1,000 kilocalories of homemade diets, compared to \$1.70 (US\$1.20) per 1,000 kilocalories for dry diets and \$7.90 (US\$5.56) per 1,000 kilocalories for wet diets. In contrast, another study on homemade diets for chronic kidney disease found that the homemade diet was the least expensive type of diet, followed by dry and wet therapeutic diets (\$2.56 (US\$1.80), \$3.10 (US\$2.18), and \$8.11 (US\$5.71) per 1,000 kilocalories, respectively).<sup>26</sup>

As the demand for fresh, less-processed pet foods continues to grow, it is clear that pet owners are striving to extend their own health-conscious habits to their animal companions. While this trend reflects a positive desire to improve pet wellness and strengthen the human-animal bond, it also means veterinarians must educate themselves on the new food forms available to pet owners and the challenges they may present in terms of nutritional adequacy, safety, and cost. Veterinary professionals play a vital role in guiding owners through these choices, helping them discern marketing from science, and ensuring pets receive complete and balanced nutrition. With collaboration between pet owners, veterinarians, and board-certified veterinary nutritionists, the movement toward fresh and whole pet foods can evolve responsibly—promoting both the enjoyment and the long-term health of the pets we consider family. 🐾

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# Latest trends and meds to get parasites to **BUG OFF**



Parasites are among the most persistent organisms that plague dogs and cats. Fleas, ticks, and mosquitoes spread bloodborne, intestinal, and zoonotic diseases, to name just a few. The bite of mites and fleas can cause pets to have unbearably itchy skin. Plus, many parasites are more widespread than ever, thanks to expanding ranges of the animals that carry them—a result not only of climate change in regions that were once less hospitable to them, but also of wider and more frequent travels by humans and their domestic animals.

In a 2021 forecast statement<sup>1</sup> from the Companion Animal Parasite Council (CAPC), Christopher Carpenter, DVM, now CAPC’s executive director, said, “Over the years, we’ve seen the risk for parasitic diseases continue to increase and expand into areas that have had historically lower prevalence.”

That’s because people are living in greater proximity to nature, according to CAPC board member I. Craig Prior, BVSC. “We’re seeing expanding ranges of animals with changing migration patterns due to climate change, which in turn enhances the ability of insects and arachnids to change or improve their range as well. As a result, parasites are dynamic and ever-changing.”

A 2022 global study<sup>2</sup> found climate change is projected to continue contributing to the spread of

Lyme disease, particularly in Canada, where vector surveillance has documented<sup>3</sup> a geographic range expansion of the black-legged tick, *Ixodes scapularis*.

“This expansion is associated with elevated temperatures, the emergence of tick populations, increases in their range and recent geographic spread, as well as with a rapid increase in human Lyme disease cases,” the researchers reported.

In addition, the season for Lyme disease in the U.S. is projected to expand in the event of a 2 C warming scenario. This would result in a 20 per cent increase in cases over the coming decades, leading to an earlier onset and a longer duration of the annual Lyme disease season.<sup>4</sup>

Cases of another potentially fatal tick-borne disease, Rocky Mountain spotted fever (RMSF), have had an overall dramatic increase since 2000, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Warmer, wetter climates have contributed to the range expansion of the ticks that spread the disease.

While it is not transmitted directly from dogs to humans, RMSF is one of the vector-borne diseases in which dogs play a crucial role as sentinels for human disease risk. Epidemiological tracking of canine RMSF is difficult, and data generally are not available, according to a 2024 paper published in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association (JAVMA)*.<sup>5</sup>

By Kim Campbell Thornton



## Making fleas (and ticks) flee

Suggest environmental management practices to clients to help them control fleas and ticks:

- Trimming brush
- Mowing grass
- Removing leaf litter and other debris
- Fencing to prevent incursions from wildlife, such as deer
- Preventing dogs from roaming

Services, such as a clinic's online store, home delivery, and auto-ship, can also help drive compliance.

Drive home the risk of ectoparasites to both pet and human health. Emerging infectious diseases are on the rise, White says.

"We share the same environment with pets, which means we are at the same risk to contract these infectious diseases directly from ectoparasites or indirectly from pets. The diseases can make pets very sick and can even be deadly." 🐾



However, the researchers write: "...seroprevalence studies in dogs can highlight regions where *R. rickettsia* is circulating and may represent risk to people. Even if a dog is not seropositive against a rickettsial organism and ticks are not seen, we can infer brown dog tick exposure and therefore possible risk of RMSF based on canine serology surveys for other brown dog tick-transmitted pathogens."

Not surprisingly, then, parasites remain a serious threat to patients and, often, their people. A 2020 study<sup>6</sup> found 20 per cent of 3,006 dogs at 288 dog parks across the U.S. had intestinal parasites. The most common gastrointestinal parasites were *Giardia*, *Ancylostoma caninum*, and *Trichuris vulpis*.

### Preventive developments

While parasite preventives have improved immensely over the past 40 years—gone for the most part are the days of dips, powders, and sprays—parasites have evolved just as rapidly, leading to resistant populations. Hookworms are a prime example.

Chemical classes used to fight parasites include isoxazolines, ivermectin, milbemycin, and lufenuron, among others. The most recent, isoxazolines, first came out in 2013. They target fleas and several tick and mite species.<sup>7</sup>

Isoxazolines have revolutionized the approach to ridding pets of fleas and ticks, says Amelia White, DVM, MS, DACVD, clinical professor of dermatology at Auburn University College of Veterinary Medicine. She appreciates their safety, efficacy, and oral and topical formulation options for dogs and cats.

"Extra-label use of these drugs is reported in the literature for treatment of ectoparasites in other species as well," Dr. White says. "As a dermatologist, I have especially appreciated the broad spectrum of activity of this class against other ectoparasites, including demodex, sarcoptes, and otodectes."

The broader protection and longer duration of action that these products offer is important for filling in compliance gaps, Dr. Prior says. Extended-duration products provide up to 12 months of protection.

Depending on the active ingredient and country in which the product is sold, registered target species include fleas, American dog ticks (*Dermacentor variabilis*), lone star ticks (*Amblyomma americanum*), black-legged ticks (*Ixodes scapularis*), paralysis ticks (*Ixodes holocyclus*), brown dog ticks (*Rhipicephalus sanguineus*), bush ticks (*Haemaphysalis longicornis*), demodectic mange mites (*Demodex* spp.), sarcoptic mange mites (*Sarcoptes scabiei*), and ear mites (*Otodectes cynotis*).

"These products have had label extensions, and increased global research studies show on- and off-label efficacies against different parasites," Prior says. "This includes around the different routes of administration. The same molecule may provide different blood levels when given by injection versus transdermal topically. It's important for the veterinarian to understand these differences and nuances of routes of administration and doses between different molecules, as well as on- and off-label claims."

For clients, the benefits lie in greater convenience. The advances mean they can give fewer products with the same or better protections because molecules from multiple products are being combined into one product, Prior says.

Some clients resist giving preventives. White says a helpful strategy is to educate them about the consequences of ectoparasite presence—infectious diseases, skin infections, pain and discomfort, pruritus, allergy, anemia, and increased risk for secondary bacterial and fungal infections—as well as the risk to themselves and their families of contracting these sometimes deadly and debilitating infectious diseases.

"Remind them these ectoparasites are difficult to see and most of the lifecycle does not occur on the pet,





making it more challenging to notice when they are present,” she says.

### Identifying pathogens fast

Diagnostics have improved, as well. Prior sees more options for patient-side testing, as well as expanded offerings for send-out testing for internal parasites using rapid PCR, antigen, and AI machine learning.

Vector-borne disease testing using molecular or serological techniques can rapidly detect pathogens spread by fleas, mosquitoes, and ticks, such as Lyme, *ehrlichia*, *anaplasma*, and heartworms, allowing them to be identified and treated before infections become severe.

For fast-moving and deadly protozoal infections, such as *Cytauxzoon felis*, some panels include a marker associated with atovaquone resistance. Treatment with a combination of atovaquone and azithromycin results in a 60 per cent survival rate, according to a 2020 study published in the *Journal of Veterinary Internal Medicine*,<sup>8</sup> but some strains may be resistant to standard therapy. Early identification of resistant species can help to guide treatment.

Finally, integration of lab results into all the various practice management systems is in the works, Prior says.

### Still fighting fleas

With so many new and improved methods of parasite control, it might seem as if fleas are no longer a concern, but Prior says that's not the case, particularly in cats. Improved diagnostics have shown the true prevalence of the flea tapeworm,<sup>9</sup> and it's not a pretty picture.

“The statistics make us realize that our flea control in cats is lacking,” he says. “It's a huge area of opportunity to protect cats and protect more people, as we know

## Key factors

Keeping parasites at bay involves a variety of approaches:

- Educating clients about the pet and human health hazards associated with common parasites
- Advising them of good environmental management practices
- Recommending products that target specific parasite species and year-round use
- Staying current with the most effective strategies for deploying parasite preventives while keeping families safe from zoonotic infection and avoiding development of resistance. 🐾



fleas also carry zoonotic diseases.” Those include plague, cat scratch disease, and tapeworms.

### Tips and resources

Parasites and parasite control are topics always of interest to researchers. Prior recommends the open-access journal *Parasites and Vectors* (<https://link.springer.com/journal/13071>) for keeping up with the latest news.

Knowing what's going on in your client's backyard is where CAPC comes in. It offers prevalence maps (<https://capcvet.org/maps#/>), helpful for educating pet owners about the parasites in their area, as well as a 30-day forecast for individual provinces and disease alerts (<https://cahss.ca/cahss-tools/disease-alerts>). The parasite forecast for 2026 is in progress and will be released in April.

“These sites help with education and engagement and help drive compliance, but it's also important to understand your client,” Prior says. “Are they able to administer medications to their pets? Are they forgetful? Do they just like convenience? Finding the pockets of resistance will help to circumvent these to recommend products that best suit their lifestyle.”

White advises clients to set an alarm on their phone or smart speaker to remind them on the same date every month to give preventatives. They may also want to consider long-acting injectable options if that better suits their lifestyle.

“It's more expensive to treat the consequences of ectoparasites than it is to prevent them,” she says. 🐾

*Kim Campbell Thornton has been writing about dogs, cats, wildlife, and marine life since 1985, and is a recipient of multiple awards for her articles and books from the Cat Writers Association, Dog Writers Association of America, and American Society of Journalists and Authors.*

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“A 2022 global study found climate change is projected to continue contributing to the spread of Lyme disease, particularly in Canada, where vector surveillance has documented a geographic range expansion of the black-legged tick, *Ixodes scapularis*.”

# The dental is in the details: CT scan in veterinary dentistry



Analyzing small and intricate anatomy is a well-known challenge in the veterinary industry, and dentistry is certainly no exception. An HDVI scan captures the detail necessary to diagnose conditions in tiny structures, like tooth roots in small animals, making it ideal for dental procedures, including:

- *Tooth extraction planning.* Identifying root fractures, ankylosis and abnormal root morphology, and locating retained roots after incomplete extraction.
- *Periodontal disease assessment.* Evaluating bone loss patterns around teeth and detecting early or hidden lesions not visible in an X-ray scan.
- *Endodontics.* Visualizing pulp chamber anatomy, root canals, and periapical lesions, and assessing healing after treatment.
- *Oral tumour diagnosis and surgical planning.* Determining tumour extent, invasion into the bone, and surgical margins, and mapping complex resections involving the mandible or maxilla.
- *Jaw fracture repair.* Precisely identifying fracture lines, fragment displacement, and dental involvement, and planning fixation without damaging the tooth roots.
- *Orthodontics/malocclusion cases.* Assessing unerupted or impacted teeth and measuring jaw symmetry and tooth alignment in 3D.
- *Resorptive lesions.* Detecting early lesions under the gumline and guiding decisions on extractions or crown amputations in this common feline condition.
- *Pre- and post-surgical follow-up.* Confirming full removal of diseased tissue and monitoring healing and bone regeneration.

By Robert Whitaker

Photos courtesy Imaginalis

As CT technology becomes more accessible, it is increasingly being utilized as a well-rounded imaging modality for dental applications.

The increase in accessibility and capabilities of computed tomography (CT) technology has understandably led to a growth in its use in the veterinary industry across a variety of applications. Dentistry is an area where CT imaging can be particularly useful, capturing small details to provide an intricate diagnostic resource.

CT in dentistry is likely to continue gaining popularity, and by reviewing the available technology, clinical applications and benefits to veterinarians, patients, and owners, that trend makes perfect sense.

## Technology with teeth

One of the driving factors in the increased presence of CT scanners in veterinary clinics is the recent addition of a new CT modality to the market. High-definition volumetric imaging (HDVI) builds a 2D and 3D image dataset of the animal patient's whole density, rather than the traditional method of stacking individual image slices. This provides veterinarians with a much finer level of detail, capturing spatial resolution down to 100 microns within safe radiation levels.

As much of the damage from periodontal conditions happens below the surface of the gumline, it may be easy to forget just how big an impact it can have on veterinary patients. A study on dogs shows regular dental cleanings and treatments of periodontal disease are linked to patients living up to 20 per cent longer compared to canine patients that did not receive dental care. This translates to an additional two to four years to the expected lifespan in some breeds.<sup>1</sup> Cats with untreated dental disease are at a higher risk of kidney disease, heart problems and weight loss, conditions that can significantly shorten the animal's life and increase pain and discomfort.<sup>2</sup>

This technology can also be applied to exotic patients.

Animals often hide dental pain, an instinct that can cause both owners and veterinarians to overlook potential issues that impact their quality of life. CT scans can help remove that barrier and provide a full assessment of the animal's periodontal health, allowing earlier detection and intervention before the condition requires a major procedure.

## More than just lip service

In addition to detailed imaging for these and other conditions in the mouth, an HDVI dental scan also captures the fine details of the ears, eyes, and nasal passage. Veterinarians can view the entire skull in 2D and 3D with clear resolution, including both hard and soft tissue details. This provides more context for the patient's condition and can help further elevate care.

HDVI CT scans are also used for chest, abdominal, and orthopedic imaging in general practice clinics that provide dental services, creating more opportunities for the modality to be utilized and to establish its place in the imaging suite.

As CT technology has continued to evolve, it has also seen improvements in its usability in veterinary settings. Modern machines are significantly faster than previous iterations or other imaging systems used today for dental applications. Oral radiographs on a dental patient can take up to 30 minutes, while an HDVI scan can be completed in less than five minutes. This enables veterinarians to access more detailed diagnostic information more quickly, facilitating rapid assessment and treatment implementation.

The need for anesthesia, a hindrance that can occasionally impede veterinarians' use of CT scanning, is also not an issue in dental care. Patients are already under anesthesia for the dental exam and cleaning, and a veterinarian can take advantage of this fact by capturing an HDVI scan to visualize everything below the gumline and other surrounding structures and tissues.

Lower cost has been another shift that increases accessibility to CT technology, giving veterinarians more information and power at the point of care. This saving is, in turn, passed on to the client, who can be assured their provider has the data they need to provide informed treatment without an impossible price tag attached to it.

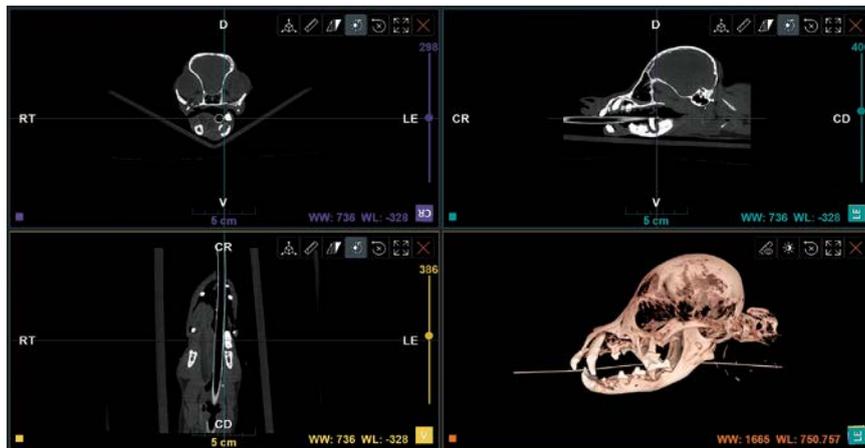
Owners also benefit from the extra visibility provided by CT imaging, particularly HDVI CT. When a veterinarian can use an image to more clearly illustrate a pet's condition to the owner, compliance with treatment recommendations can increase exponentially. Not only are HDVI scans high-resolution, capturing even the tiniest details, but they can also be rendered in 3D and colorized. The problem can be clearly visualized and explained, allowing the veterinarian to more easily obtain permission to complete the necessary treatment.

## On the cusp of greatness

The advancement of CT technology and its subsequent growth as a cornerstone in veterinary dentistry have already brought it into the spotlight as the gold standard for patient images, and this trend has every indication of continuing.

Ultrasound saw a similar trajectory over the past few decades. In the 1990s and early 2000s, only specialty clinics offered ultrasound machines; now, virtually all veterinary practices have an ultrasound system they use daily.

Dental CT is already a much more established clinic staple than it was just a few years ago. For example, one veterinary group with over 30 locations across the Western U.S. has made dental imaging with an HDVI unit a standard component of all new patient intakes, in addition to regularly using it for diagnosis on existing



Bob, a mixed-breed canine, exhibits signs of widespread periodontal disease, specifically stage 4 periodontitis, characterized by tooth and bone loss visible from every angle.



A 3D image of this feline patient can be manipulated to analyze dental health, as well as conditions in the surrounding facial structures.

patients. This is a relatively new and niche feature to offer patients, but as technology continues to become more affordable with additional capabilities like pairing with surgical planning software, it will likely continue to be adopted into more clinics.

Last December marked 130 years since Wilhelm Röntgen took the first X-ray. In just a handful of decades, the capabilities of this technology have absolutely skyrocketed from blurry low-contrast pictures to interactive 3D models that accurately illustrate even the tiniest anatomical details. No one knows what the next innovation will be or how it will elevate the tools and information available to veterinarians. However, what we can say with some degree of certainty is that good things are coming in the realm of HDVI, and the next couple of decades will see an even greater improvement in accessibility, capability, client confidence, and patient outcomes. 🐾

*With nearly three decades in the animal health industry, Robert Whitaker is an experienced animal imaging technician and veterinary business professional. Whitaker has made significant contributions to advancing imaging in food animal, large animal, and small animal applications since 1995. He is the business development director for Veterinary in North America at Imaginalis.*

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# In conversation

with incoming CVMA president, Kathleen MacMillan, DVM, M.Sc., DABVP (Equine)

By Ties Morgan

Photo courtesy  
Dr. Kathleen MacMillan

MacMillan with her  
Standardbred mare  
Maia, 28.

**K**athleen MacMillan, DVM, M.Sc., DABVP (Equine), grew up on a horse farm on Prince Edward Island, which made her choice of profession unsurprising to those who knew her as a child. She is an equine ambulatory veterinarian and an associate professor at the Atlantic Veterinary College (AVC) at the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI).

Dr. MacMillan completed all her education in her home province. She earned her bachelor of science, master of science in equine exercise physiology, and doctor of veterinary medicine degrees from UPEI. She furthered her training and, in 2013, became a diplomate of the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners in Equine Practice.

In 2025, she was named president-elect of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA). Her appointment was announced at the CVMA's July convention in Victoria, B.C., and she will become CVMA president at the July 2026 convention in Charlottetown, P.E.I.

"As someone who leans naturally toward being introverted, stepping outside my comfort zone to represent the profession on national and international stages will require personal growth—but it's a challenge I'm ready for," she tells *Veterinary Practice News Canada*.

MacMillan's professional journey includes experience in private practice, both as an associate and a practice owner. She ran a solo equine ambulatory service in P.E.I. for six years before joining the AVC faculty in 2010. Her clinical and research interests include preventive medicine, dentistry, equine sports medicine, and equine welfare.

A strong advocate for service to the profession, MacMillan has dedicated significant time over the years to various national and international organizations. Her involvement includes roles with the CVMA, the International Council for Veterinary Assessment/North American Veterinary Licensing Examination, the Educational Commission for Foreign Veterinary Graduates, and the American Veterinary Medical Association Council on Education, to name a few.

MacMillan is passionate about caring for her equine patients and mentoring the next generation of veterinarians. She actively promotes education by creating learning opportunities for veterinarians, horse owners, and regulatory professionals.

Her pet family expanded in 2022 when she adopted three littermate kittens—Simba, Tulip, and Penny—joining her two beloved horses.

As she embarks on her new role, *Veterinary Practice News Canada* connected with MacMillan to discuss



her strategic direction and the unique qualities she brings to representing Canada's veterinary community.

***Veterinary Practice News Canada (VPC):*** How has your career as an equine ambulatory veterinarian prepared you for your role as president-elect of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA)?

**Kathleen MacMillan, DVM, M.Sc., DABVP (Equine) (KM):** My 24-year career as an equine ambulatory veterinarian has given me a deep appreciation for both the rewards and challenges of everyday veterinary practice. Working as an ambulatory veterinarian means that much of my time is spent on the road, serving a wide range of clients and horses in various environments where I juggle routine appointments, complex cases and emergencies. These experiences have strengthened my problem-solving abilities, resilience, and communication skills.

Over the years, I've had the privilege of experiencing the profession from multiple perspectives: as an associate veterinarian, a practice owner, and, for the past 15 years, as an academic. I'm fortunate to be in a role where I can continue providing clinical service while teaching future veterinarians the nuances of equine practice.

These experiences have offered a firsthand look at the emotional demands, long hours, and immense satisfaction that are part of our profession. They've also fueled my commitment to advocate for a profession that is both challenging and profoundly meaningful.

As president-elect, I plan to draw on this background to listen to our members, promote mentorship and inclusivity, and help develop sustainable solutions that strengthen veterinary medicine across Canada.

**VPC: What kind of strategic direction will you bring to the CVMA?**

**KM:** As president-elect of the CVMA, I bring with me not only the perspective of a practitioner, but my approach is guided by the belief that collaboration and compassion drive meaningful progress. The same dedication I bring to my patients and clients inspires me to support my colleagues at the national level.

One of my priorities is strengthening the CVMA's connection with members across all regions and career stages — from students to seasoned veterinarians, in both clinical and non-clinical roles. By fostering an inclusive and collaborative community, we can better reflect the diversity of voices that make up Canadian veterinary medicine.

My strategic focus is rooted in connection: reinforcing the relationships between veterinarians, the association, and the communities we serve. I believe the CVMA must continue to be a unifying voice — one that listens deeply, responds thoughtfully, and advocates effectively for all sectors of our profession. My priorities include championing wellness, supporting education, promoting a sustainable workforce, and increasing engagement across the profession.

**VPC: What do you think will be the most challenging and enjoyable parts of the role, and why?**

**KM:** I anticipate that connecting with people across the country will be both the most challenging and the most rewarding aspect of the role.

At the same time, I'm genuinely excited about the opportunity to listen to, learn from, and engage with colleagues from all corners of the veterinary profession. I expect those conversations to be incredibly inspiring. I am deeply grateful for the chance to serve our profession and hope to do so with the same grace and humility shown by those who have led before me.

**VPC: The presidency includes being the voice for veterinary professionals across Canada; how do you stay connected to ensure all voices are heard?**

**KM:** In the 24 years of working alongside practitioners, specialists, and industry partners, I've learned that teamwork, adaptability, and empathy are essential when advancing animal health and professional well-being. I also recognize that I'm not alone in making decisions or representing our profession. We have an exceptional group of dynamic veterinarians at the CVMA Council table, each bringing valuable perspectives from diverse areas of practice, industry, and academia. We also have the president of the student association, who is an important voice sitting at our table. I plan to draw on that collective wisdom and experience to ensure that every voice is heard and that our decisions reflect the depth and diversity of veterinary medicine in Canada.

While our profession encompasses many roles and environments, we do share core values: a commitment to animal health, client service, public

“My strategic focus is rooted in connection: reinforcing the relationships between veterinarians, the association, and the communities we serve. I believe the CVMA must continue to be a unifying voice – one that listens deeply, responds thoughtfully, and advocates effectively for all sectors of our profession.”

health and the well-being of our teams. A rural solo large-animal veterinarian may face different daily challenges than an emergency veterinarian in a major city, but our shared purpose unites us. That common ground will guide how I stay connected and ensure all voices are heard.

**VPC: What are the top three pressing issues affecting veterinary professionals on a national level?**

**KM:** I see three interconnected issues as the most pressing: workforce shortages, the mental well-being of veterinary teams, and access to care.

**Workforce shortages** continue to place significant pressure on existing teams, contributing to burnout and limiting access to services. The CVMA anticipates shortages until at least 2031. Canada's five veterinary colleges graduate roughly 450 veterinarians per year; however, not all stay in the country, and we are struggling to keep pace with attrition, let alone future demand.

**Mental health** across the profession has reached a critical point. High rates of burnout, compassion fatigue, and even suicidal ideation are being reported. Heavy workloads, emotionally demanding cases, long hours, and moral distress compound these challenges. Many of us entered this field out of a deep love for animals, but the emotional and physical demands can take a significant toll on our team members.

**Access to care** remains a growing concern. Demand has surged since the pandemic, and we're struggling to keep up. Geographic disparities are widening: rural and large-animal practices face acute shortages, and clients in some regions must travel long distances for routine and/or emergency care. New graduates often gravitate toward urban small-animal practice, leaving service gaps in equine and livestock sectors as well as more rural small animal practices. This also affects other sectors in veterinary medicine and not just clinical practice.

These issues each feed into one another. Workforce shortages contribute to burnout, which drives attrition, further limiting access to care. Meaningful progress will require long-term, co-ordinated efforts across education, regulation, and workplace culture to ensure a sustainable and healthy veterinary profession in Canada. It's also important to recognize that these challenges are not unique to Canada—many countries are facing similar pressures. 🐾

# A profession in progress: RVTs across Canada

Registered veterinary technicians/technologists (RVTs) are key contributors in every veterinary setting, appreciated for the knowledge and skills they bring to the veterinary team in delivering animal care. *Veterinary Practice News Canada* is graciously providing this space so that we can champion the profession, and you can learn more about what it means to be an RVT in Canada.

Executive directors from Canada's seven veterinary technician associations will be contributing their thoughts and stories to the column – the Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians (OAVT), the Alberta Veterinary Technologist Association (ABVTA), the British Columbia Veterinary Technologists Association (BCVTA), the Association des techniciens en santé animale du Québec (ATSAQ), the Eastern Veterinary Technicians Association (EVTA), the Manitoba Veterinary Technologists Association (MVTA), and the Saskatchewan Association of Veterinary Technologists (SAVT).

Our first column introduces each association, the unique challenges they face, and what is in store for 2026.

## OAVT

Ontario will soon be the first province to license RVTs in the same way veterinarians are licensed. The OAVT's 4,925 RVTs are facing the biggest transition the association has seen since its inception.

"Our biggest challenge is also our greatest opportunity," explained executive director Elise Wickett, MBA, RVT, GPC.D. "The OAVT is moving through a significant period of change from a dual-mandated professional association with regulatory authority for RVTs, to being focused on supporting our members and advocating for the RVT profession as a professional association. This change has come about because of the passing of new legislation in Ontario, the *Veterinary Professionals Act*. We are excited to be charting a path toward progress for the RVT profession and shared success with veterinarians as the legislation comes into force."

## ABVTA

With approximately 2,750 registered members and 600 students, the ABVTA's biggest challenge is building workforce capacity in the face of RVT shortages, while ensuring that current resources are used strategically and effectively.

"Our primary goal for 2026 is to strengthen and sustain the RVT workforce by advancing advocacy, partnerships, and effective resource use," explained executive director Vanessa George, RVT. "This includes maintaining and expanding member services that empower RVTs and reinforce their essential role in advancing the profession."

## BCVTA

The BCVTA faces the opposite challenge of many of its sister associations – the lack of regulation of RVTs in B.C. Its primary goal for 2026 will be to advocate on behalf of the 1,332 RVTs it represents to open the *Veterinarians Act* to regulate the profession.

The BCVTA is led by executive director Amber Gregg, RVT, who grew up on a farm and participated in 4-H (a global youth development program focused on hands-on learning), fostering a lifelong love of animals.

"I had no idea that RVTs were a thing and when I found out, I knew that was my career!" Gregg exclaimed. "I am grateful to work with my colleagues at the BCVTA and the other provincial associations to advance the profession for future generations of RVTs."

## ATSAQ

ATSAQ is comprised of 1,278 members and is looking to advance its advocacy at both the provincial and national levels.

"Provincially, we are looking to grow the relationship with members and industry partners and deal with the new veterinary law that will affect the Quebec [animal health technicians] AHTs next spring," explained executive director Élisabeth Lebeau, AHT. "Nationally, we wish to contribute to our new executive director group to have a stronger national voice and a vision for the Canadian profession."

## EVTA

The EVTA has 923 members, but unlike the other associations, it is dealing with multiple jurisdictions.

"Our association is unique in that we encompass all four Atlantic provinces, all of which are at different stages in legislative changes in regards to RVTs and veterinary medicine," explained executive director Heather Trimm, RVT. "Our biggest challenge at this time is providing enough resources to dedicate to advocacy and collaboration with our legislative bodies in each province."

The EVTA will be working with each provincial government in 2026 to see legislation pass that will provide adequate protection and advancement for the veterinary technology profession in the region.

## MVTA

The small but mighty MVTA is facing similar shortages and retention challenges as the other provinces, with 441 active RVT members and 65 student members.

"The 'veterinary technologist' title is protected under *The Veterinary Medical Act*, with RVTs upholding a defined scope excluding diagnosing, prescribing, or surgery," said executive director Donna Taraschuk, RVT. "Yet keeping highly trained and experienced RVTs in the profession remains difficult. There are many contributing factors to this challenge, and we hope the provincial reports released in 2026 will guide our efforts to address them."

Those reports covered rural access to care and the veterinary-client patient relationship, a feasibility study for the advanced RVT role, and barriers to utilization.

## SAVT

The SAVT is led by executive director Lisa-Marie Smith, RVT, who takes over for Carolyn Cartwright, RVT. On its website, the SAVT notes it was established in 1985 and advocates for, supports, and advances the RVT profession through leadership, education, and collaboration.

The executive directors meet quarterly and continue to build on the collaborative work they started in the summer to ensure the veterinary technician/technology profession thrives across Canada, and RVTs get the recognition they deserve. To connect directly with the National RVT Provincial Association executive director group, please email [nationalrvtpaed@gmail.com](mailto:nationalrvtpaed@gmail.com). 

*Kate Stockmann-Fetter brings over 20 years of communications expertise to her role as digital communications specialist at the Ontario Association of Veterinary Technicians (OAVT). A former broadcast journalist, she now leads online communications and digital strategy, while serving as editor-in-chief of the RVT Journal. She holds postgraduate credentials from Fanshawe College. In her spare time, she enjoys hiking with her two rescue dogs, Ziggy and Ruby, and cuddling with her spicy cat, Nacho.*

# 5 questions with...

Stephanie Keroack, DVM, IPSAV, DEA in Toxicology, director of professional veterinary affairs in Canada for Hill's Pet Nutrition



Dr. Keroack and her team value the insights that pet parents can provide them on how proper nutrition helps their pets lead their best lives.

Canada's veterinary sector is evolving rapidly, driven by increasing caseloads, heightened client expectations, and a growing emphasis on evidence-based clinical decision-making.

In this environment, leadership roles that support veterinary teams and strengthen professional collaboration are becoming more crucial.

With her recent appointment to oversee veterinary affairs in Canada, Stephanie Keroack DVM, IPSAV, DEA in Toxicology, offers a mix of clinical, academic, and industry experience.

Dr. Keroack earned her doctor of veterinary medicine degree and completed an internship in small animal medicine and surgery at the faculty of veterinary medicine, University of Montreal. She later pursued a postgraduate degree in toxicology in France. Keroack's career includes private practice, academia, and the animal health industry.

In this sit-down with *Veterinary Practice News Canada*, Keroack shares her vision for supporting the profession, the needs she observes across the country, and how her background will shape her work in the years ahead.

## 1) What are the most pressing challenges facing Canadian veterinary teams today, and how do you plan to address them in your new leadership role?

What excites me most about the opportunities for my professional veterinary affairs team with Hill's Pet Nutrition (Hill's) is the chance to work closely with veterinary professionals and make an even greater impact on pet health and nutrition. The veterinary industry is currently navigating a complex landscape of challenges. Inflationary pressures are significantly

impacting consumer purchasing power, contributing to a noticeable slowdown in pet adoption and ownership rates. In addition, this is having an impact on veterinary visits as pet parents prioritize spending. Nevertheless, I am inspired by how the people in our industry show resilience, creativity, and dedication, and how they continue to show up at work and help the pets we love.

To me, helping in the best way possible means being with people. One of the things I've been doing is spending a lot of time in the field. So, I listen carefully to our veterinary customers, spend time with the sales teams, attend industry events, and ask our customers how we can help support them. In 2026, the focus will be on continuing to cultivate trust with the profession through our veterinary affairs team. That means helping our teams connect with and educate our customers about Hill's products and creating top-notch events and experiences for the industry. We want to facilitate scientific exchanges around medical conditions and share how nutrition can make a real difference for pets.

## 2) Nutrition is central to preventive and therapeutic care. How will you support clinicians integrating evidence-based nutritional recommendations into everyday practice?

Hill's is dedicated to empowering the veterinary profession, recognizing that veterinarians' success is vital



Dr Stephanie Keroack

Photos courtesy Hill's Pet Nutrition Inc.



Hill's partners with veterinary colleges throughout Canada, providing vet students with opportunities to deepen their knowledge of pet nutrition.



Hill's strives to raise awareness of nutrition as a key element of pet health and care through a variety of industry and academic partnerships throughout Canada.

to pet well-being. This commitment is brought to life through investments such as research and supporting a university professorship to ensure the next generation of veterinarians receives comprehensive training in clinical nutrition. Hill's further supports practicing veterinary teams by providing essential, real-time resources, including the free Veterinary Consultation Service (VCS) for expert dietary guidance, the robust online Hill's Veterinary Academy and the annual Hill's Global Symposium for professional development and essential continuing education (CE) opportunities.

### **3) Your career spans clinical practice, academia, and industry. How have these experiences shaped your leadership approach and your vision for advancing veterinary care?**

My mission with the Hill's professional veterinary affairs team is to help people grow. I bring this to life by actively seeking feedback for myself and intentionally providing positive, constructive feedback to team members. I realized how valuable this was during my professional journey. I went to veterinary school at the Faculté de médecine vétérinaire at the Université de

Montréal. After that, I completed an internship there and then practiced in a small animal clinic. I also had the chance to work in France and earn a master's degree in toxicology. Later, I took on a sales role that exposed me to industry opportunities, and I fell in love with it. I discovered that the industry really allows you to be in learning mode every day. Looking back, I believe that feedback from peers has truly prepared me for a leadership role. Leadership is about serving others and being there so others can succeed. The veterinary profession often faces tough situations, and people need that support.

### **4) Canada's veterinary community is diverse, from rural to urban and Northern regions. How will you tailor outreach and foster collaboration across these varied contexts?**

Canada is such a vast country, with veterinary professionals serving communities from Newfoundland to Nunavut. Hill's Canada is proud to have supported veterinary teams across Canada for 30 years. We are proud to have six professional consulting veterinarians located across the country to support the educational needs of the veterinary community. We host live events in many cities across the country, and are also able to interact through live virtual education with selected groups and through Hill's Veterinary Academy.

### **5) Engaging future professionals is key to progress. How do you see early-career veterinarians influencing the future of clinical nutrition, and how will you support their development?**

For Hill's, supporting Canadian university veterinary programs has been a long-standing tradition, rooted in our commitment to nurture and educate young, talented people entering our industry. It spans from students starting their journeys and becoming familiar with our brand and science, to larger partnerships that foster school development and involvement in major research projects.

We have an array of programs with various universities, including:

- Providing food to support hospitalized pets in need of specialized nutrition to aid in their recovery.
- Sponsoring food giveaways to recognize canine blood donors at university-sponsored pet blood drives.
- Offering discounts on Hill's food to veterinary professionals and students through the Hill's VIP feeding program.
- Supporting the Hill's Pet Nutrition Weight Care program at the Ontario Veterinary College in a common effort to improve pet health through return to wellness care.
- Helping close the nutrition education gap at the University of Calgary through a sponsorship of the nutrition professorship in a joint effort to improve knowledge and skill in pet nutrition.

Through these programs and others, we hope to raise the awareness of nutrition as a key element of pet health and care and develop career-long relationships with the next generation of Canadian veterinary practitioners. 🐾

~ Ties Morgan



# Diabetic Remission is Possible

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