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EDITOR'S NOTE

Information Overload

Daily use of the internet has become a way of life for many people, and with the advancement of technology and Internet of Things (IoT)¹, our clients are increasingly equipped with health information before attending appointments. A 2016 study showed that least half of adults surveyed reported daily internet usage, up 33% from 18% in 2007.²

Part of the reason why clients are researching health information online is that they feel it places them in a stronger position to communicate effectively with the veterinarian. However, concern remains regarding the quality of information found online. After all, not everything online is true! Owners also face potential challenges in using the internet to evaluate medical information to avoid confusion and conflicting advice.

While there can be a wide range of benefits associated with accessing online health information, including speed, accessibility, anonymity and the sheer volume of information, there are also clear disadvantages to using the internet to ascertain health information, such as accuracy, privacy concerns, and the potential for self-misdiagnosis. These benefits and disadvantages are applicable not only to human health but also to veterinary medicine.

OPEN DIALOGUE WITH CLIENTS

So what conversations are we having with our clients about using the internet to access the best information for their use? Apparently, many veterinarians have been hiding from this issue. A recent online survey targeting pet owners resulted in 571 respondents who reported that the most frequently used source for pet health

“True genius resides in the capacity for evaluation of uncertain, hazardous, and conflicting information.”

— Winston Churchill

information was the internet (78.6%), followed by their veterinarian (72%)!³ Veterinarians and other pet owners, however, were rated as the most trustworthy sources. The topics most often investigated online were specific medical problems (61%) and diet/nutrition (58%). Regarding the owner–veterinarian relationship, nearly 42% of respondents reported “sometimes” discussing information they found online with their veterinarian. When asked if their veterinarian recommended specific websites, nearly half of the respondents stated their veterinarian “never” made such recommendations, yet over 90% said they would visit veterinarian-recommended websites.

We can't continue to hide behind IoT as a go-to source for our clients. They need us to guide them to reliable sites that provide the highest-quality content to support the wellbeing of their pets. **TVP**

Suggested Sites

- todaysveterinarypractice.com
- avma.org/public/PetCare

¹The internet of things, or IoT, is a system of interrelated computing devices, mechanical and digital machines, objects, animals or people that are provided with unique identifiers (UIDs) and the ability to transfer data over a network without requiring human-to-human or human-to-computer interaction. <https://internetofthingsagenda.techtarget.com/definition/Internet-of-Things-IoT>, accessed July 25, 2018.

²Office for National Statistics UK. Internet access households and individuals. 2016.

³Kogan L, Oxley JA, Hellyer, P, et al. UK pet owners' use of the internet for online pet health information. 2018;182:1-8.