



HERE'S A SECRET ...

Pet Owners Are Your Teammates

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“Foiled again!” the cartoon villain voice in my head exclaimed as my veterinary nurse shot me an “I told you so” look. He had correctly identified an infectious process in a patient that I previously dismissed as having COO—aka Crazy Overprotective Owner!

I ate crow (or, in this case, Amazon parrot) and reported these findings to the eccentric, yet intuitive owner, who presented the parrot for an exam because “his voice was different.” Luckily, I did a good job of hiding my heavy skepticism from the owner that day and she didn’t see that I hadn’t given much credence to her initial concerns. It turns out, I was misled by my own assumptions, misconceptions, and impatience.

This was not the only time I’ve seen an owner’s intuition and vague complaints turn out to be an important indicator of their pet’s health. While it is always frustrating to run diagnostics only to find normal results, it is equally satisfying to find the answers to vague symptoms noticed by the owner. In fact, this case reminded me of

how much health care takes place at home. And, really, are pet owners any different from a home healthcare worker? Home healthcare workers provide important services for the elderly, patients with diabetes, and patients who need physical therapy, bandages, and wound care. They are a critical part of health care. We know that this is equally important—if not more so—in veterinary medicine. We’ve all had cases where a devoted and observant owner was able to not only follow our recommendations and provide care but also catch a small change—an early indicator of a decline or improvement—or go the extra mile in some way that made a huge difference to the recovery of their pet.

In fact, owners essentially serve as an extension of your own clinic team in their home every day. What if we took that realization into every appointment? You aren’t talking just to an owner but to a pet’s devoted home healthcare provider. Consider their observations to be potential symptoms, review their food and poop log books, and be sure they understand your expectations of them. That means treating them like an extension of your staff. Trust, communication, and education should be at the core of your relationship. They need to understand the culture of your clinic, trust your staff, and exhibit mutual respect for you and your team. Recognizing their limitations—along with the extent of their experience and abilities—can help a healthy, productive relationship develop. With more pet owners on my side, I am confident that cartoon villain acting out in my brain can be vanquished as well! **TVP**

Ben Kirchner

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This column is titled “The Secret Life Vets” so I can talk about the secrets that really should be considered well-known truths. These are the not-so-secret secrets that can help change our thinking and our profession for the better.

