Dear Clients and Friends...

One of the concepts I’ve always believed in and tried to uphold here at Best Friends Veterinary Center is Consistency of Care. The theory behind it is that no patient should receive a greater or lesser level of care simply because they saw one doctor and not another. Clients shouldn’t receive better or worse customer service if they talk to one receptionist and not someone else. Every client and every patient should receive the same high level of care every time.

In order to practice medicine consistently well, we need to have medical protocols that are up to date and agreed on by all the doctors in the practice, for all the common problems we see routinely. Rare things we can look up and discuss but for everything else there should be an organized system. Receptionist and assistant training means that if you call about a vomiting or coughing pet you will always get the same advice.

If we do this correctly, you shouldn’t notice that we are! I shouldn’t hear clients saying that they got a different shampoo, antibiotic or pain medication from the other doctor for treating the same problem. (Nor do I want to stock three shampoos for seborrhea because each doctor wants to use a different brand.) I shouldn’t have to worry when I’m out of town that my patients aren’t being taken care of as well, nor should you, and you should get a cheerful, helpful receptionist every time you call us.

Even in a small practice like ours, consistency of care can be a challenge. My associate doctors have both worked here for years (Dr. Horsch passed her ten year anniversary date this year!) so we’ve had the same basic protocols for years now. The problem comes when we change something and then one or another of us doesn’t remember we changed it, or one of us changed something ourselves without making sure both other doctors know about it. We recently realized we were all doing something different for Herpes eye ulcers in cats and had to sit down and review each others seminar notes to come up with a protocol we all agreed upon.

It’s easy to forget we have a new drug or product, or that something is backordered and we are using something else instead. It’s difficult to pass along a whole four or five day conference in an hour or two of team meeting or rounds, too, so often we end up just distilling down the major things and when something less common comes along we may forget that we heard about a solution but the other doctors didn’t.

It is also challenging for new employees. For example, our three receptionists have all been here for less than a year. All of them have worked in other veterinary hospitals and after a while it can be tough to remember if the way to handle a problem that’s in your head actually was learned here or came from a different environment where it may not be correct according to how we do things here at Best Friends. It takes us a full year to get a new employee up to speed with all of our clinic protocols, even if they have experience.

In summary, medical care in an ideal world should not be hit or miss – but in many practices it often is. Though it takes more time and effort, we feel that following a philosophy of consistency of care raises our practice to a higher level.

Nan Boss, DVM

A News Tidbit

Because of abuse and addiction in humans, THE DRUG TRAMADOL HAS BECOME A CLASS IV CONTROLLED SUBSTANCE.

This means if we are prescribing it for your pets you will now need a written prescription for the pharmacy; we can no longer just call in a prescription for you.

There is a good chance that the extra regulatory paperwork needed for controlled substances will trigger pharmacies to increase its price as well.
Cat Bites: 29.5% of human patients who seek medical treatment for a cat bite wound end up hospitalized for IV antibiotics. Cats harbor some nasty bacteria in their mouths. If you are bitten by a cat, we recommend that you seek medical attention right away. Taking oral antibiotics beginning immediately after the bite could prevent a more serious infection a few days later. Always wash any puncture wounds out well with soap and water or hydrogen peroxide. Swelling or redness, and especially red streaks going up a limb from the site of a bite, could mean a serious infection is brewing.

Lakeshore Veterinary Specialty & Referral Hospital in Glendale is one of only nine emergency centers in the U.S. to earn the designation of Veterinary Trauma Center from the Veterinary Emergency & Critical Care Society (VECCS). As with human trauma centers, this means that specialists in emergency and critical care are available at the facility 24/7. Fox Valley Animal Referral Center in Appleton also made the list. We are fortunate to have two such hospitals in our area, since there are so few of them, compared to 428 human hospital trauma centers in the U.S.

Time to Urinate: A new study investigated how quickly 32 animals urinate. It turns out that it’s all about the same. Even though an elephant’s bladder is 3,600 times larger than a cat’s (18 liters vs. 5 milliliters), both animals relieve themselves in about 20 seconds. Pretty darn amazing!

Ahhh....

20 seconds!!

Common Pet Owner Misconceptions

I have tried to write this article multiple times but I always felt like I would make people feel stupid or I was being unkind to point them out. It amazes me though how many pet owners share the same untrue beliefs, like it’s instinctive to believe certain things or to come to a wrong conclusion. I want to dispel a few myths that lead to animals not getting the diagnosis or care they should.

The most common and frustrating beliefs that affect us every day at Best Friends involve pain in pets. Surveys show that most pet owners believe they would know if their pet was in pain. However, unless they have been trained in what to watch for, most pet owners don’t actually recognize pain in their dogs and cats. That’s part of why millions of pets are undertreated for arthritis – their owners don’t perceive that stiffness and inability to jump, play or go up and down stairs is connected to pain. It is, though.

Pain doesn’t usually look like pet owners expect it to. Dogs and cats rarely whimper or cry out except when they actually incur an injury – the moment you step on the tail or the bone breaks. Instead they get quiet. They may cry or bite if you try to interact with them or move them but for the most part they are silent when they suffer. They may tremble, stare into space or become withdrawn and hide. Some cats will actually purr when they are painful or ill.

Both pets in the following pictures are extremely painful.

Rules of thumb for DIAGNOSING PAIN:

- Stiffness or lameness always mean pain, regardless of whether the pet is still eating and behaving fairly normally. People don’t moan from a sprained ankle but it still hurts.
- Dental disease hurts, too, even if the pet is still eating.
- If the eye is red or squinting, it hurts.
- If the ear is red or the pet is shaking its head or holding it cocked to the side, it hurts.
- Anything raw, red or swollen hurts.
- If the pet isn’t eating, playing or interacting with you he may be in pain.
- Guarding any part of the body or a tucked up abdomen means pain. Both pets in the pictures on page 3 have abdominal pain.
- Reluctance to walk, jump or go up and down stairs usually means back pain. In cats, not jumping up as high is often a sign of arthritis.

To learn more, follow this link to the Pain Assessment handout on our website:

http://bestfriendsvet.com/pdffiles/Pain3pgs.pdf
Their heads are down, they are paying no attention to their surroundings and they are standing or lying in an awkward position that doesn't look relaxed or natural.

Another set of myths we hear frequently have to do with allergies. First, people don't understand that scratching or licking an area of the body is due to itching, so they don't call us about it. The pet gets more and more miserable, until it has open sores on its face, ears, feet or legs from it. If a pet is licking an area it either hurts or itches and it needs to be treated.

Second, they don't understand that the immune system needs repeated exposure to something to become allergic to it. We don't become allergic to the pollen, bee sting or medication when we encounter it for the first time. It takes repeated or lengthy exposure. Allergies worsen with time and usually are to common things, not rare ones. The most common food ingredient to cause a food allergy in pets is the major protein source in their regular food, not something new. The fact that you didn't give the pet anything new doesn't mean it doesn't have allergies!

It only takes a tiny amount of whatever the pet is allergic to in order to get a reaction. The amount of bee venom, pollen or flea saliva that triggers a reaction is miniscule – so it's not OK to give a pet "just a tiny amount" of something they are allergic to!

Lastly, we can't cure allergies, any more than we can in people. If your dog or cat has allergies it will always have them and it may need medication or a special diet forever. You can't stop once the pet improves and expect the symptoms to never come back!

There are a lot of common myths about pet food and nutrition for cats and dogs. To learn more about what's truth and what is propaganda by pet food manufacturers visit our youtube channel, BFVCTV.
We have recently been posting a lot of cases onto our Facebook page and we are archiving them on a cases page on our website.

For lots of interesting pictures and stories visit www.bestfriendsvet.com!

Use Caution “Up North”

We removed all these porcupine quills (at right) from a dog’s muzzle, lips and tongue last year (under anesthesia, of course). This is a frequent problem for dogs running around in the North woods, especially at night.

Other problems we see frequently in these circumstances include:

• GETTING LOST (make sure your dog has a microchip and a legible name tag)
• ALGAE POISONING from swimming in ponds with blue-green algae (if the scum on top of the water is blue-green in color, keep your dog away)
• SPRAYED BY A SKUNK (we have a special shampoo for that and a recipe for a homemade odor-remover that is much more effective than tomato juice)
• FALLING THROUGH THE ICE OR INTO FAST-MOVING WATER
• CAUGHT IN A TRAP (Leg-hold traps are an abomination no matter what species get caught in them)
• SWIMMERS TAIL, where a dog does so much swimming he sprains his tail and can’t move it for a while (he needs pain medication)
• CUTS AND WOUNDS (keep a first aid kit in your car, provisioned for dogs as well as humans)
• TICKS AND TICK-BORNE DISEASES (make sure your dog is protected before you head up North!)

Use caution and common sense whenever you travel with pets.

What do you see on this x-ray of a dog’s abdomen?

Puppies! There are at least 9 puppy skulls and spines visible inside the uterus. This dog, a pug and beagle mix (known as a puggle) named Bug, was having urinary accidents and was breathing more rapidly than she normally does. We thought this was just because of the pressure from all those little bodies! The poor momma was 30 lb. pre-pregnancy and at this point weighed 41 lb. – that’s 11 lb. of puppies, placentas and placental fluid!

Bug went on to have nine healthy puppies. Afterwards, all her urinary accidents went away – she must have felt quite relieved after they were all out of her body and into the world!

Lyme Disease Case

Ruby is a 9 year old Labrador retriever. A few months ago, he began having some stiffness and soreness in his limbs. The owners thought he was developing arthritis, and occasionally gave him an anti-inflammatory medication for pain.

Then one day, he became unable to walk properly. His owners had to carry him into the clinic for examination. When he did walk, it was very stiff and with a great amount of pain, and he had painful joints in all four legs. Dr. Horsch suspected Lyme disease.

Not only did he test positive for Lyme, Ruby also had a low platelet count, and he was losing a large amount of protein through his kidneys. Both of these problems are caused by Lyme disease, which can lead to abnormal bleeding or bruising and kidney failure, in addition to damaging the joints.

We began treatment with minocycline (an antibiotic that kills the bacteria that causes the disease) as well as pain medication to help with his joints, and he was feeling better and walking great the next day. Unfortunately, treatment is expensive, and the road to a complete recovery is long. There can be permanent kidney or joint damage and arthritis as a result of Lyme infection. Please make sure to use a veterinary-recommended tick preventive, and to have us protect your dog with Lyme vaccinations if your pet is at risk.

Use caution and common sense whenever you travel with pets.
Elbow Callus

This huge growth is an elbow callus in a mastiff. Giant breed dogs can develop heavy calluses on their elbows from lying down, one of the many problems these dogs can have due to their weight and size. We also see these occasionally in other dogs, especially the short-legged breeds such as Corgis or Bassets. This was the worst one we've ever seen. These lumps often crack, bleed and become infected, making the problem much worse.

Smaller calluses can be surgically removed but that can be problematic since the dog will then be lying on the incision. Careful padded bandaging is needed afterwards. Therapy laser treatment and anti-inflammatory medications can be helpful.

A better way to go is to treat these early on by using a set of padded elbow guards with a strap over the shoulders to keep them from sliding down the dog's legs. Visit www.doglegs.com to learn more.

Hemangiosarcoma

Tumors of the spleen are common in older, large breed dogs. If the tumor is benign (non-cancerous), removing the spleen cures the disease – if we can catch it before it ruptures, causing the pet to bleed to death. The prognosis is much better, and the surgery expense is much less, if we catch these tumors when they are small, like in the picture at left. Regular examinations to palpate the abdomen, testing to look for abnormal red blood cells caused by the tumor, and x-ray or ultrasound screening, can all help us to catch the problem early. Another thing you can do at home is to always keep an eye on the color of your pet’s gums. If they look pale, instead of a healthy pink color, the dog may be bleeding internally. Other symptoms would be an enlarged abdomen, weakness, collapse, or poor appetite.

To watch our video on this disease, follow this link http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9HBPwYG5CW4

More tidbits

1) Where the Worms Are

The www.wormsandgermsblog.com educational website has created a sister website called www.wormsandgermsmap.com, in order to map and track infectious and parasitic diseases of dogs, cats and horses.

It’s interesting to see the differences in diseases depending on what part of the country you look at. The new site will also allow us to easily determine if a particular disease has begun to appear in our area.

2) Flea Collar Ban

The EPA has banned flea collars containing the chemical propoxur due to toxicity to children whose pets are wearing these collars. Many older over-the-counter flea compounds have far lower safety margins than newer drugs.

Flea collars can not only be toxic to children but to the pets who wear them. Flea collars are associated with oral cancer in cats, and pesticides used in lawn sprays are linked to higher cancer risk in dogs. Please ask us for a recommendation for parasite prevention in your pet. Just because you can buy it in a store doesn’t mean a product is safe.

3) Old Bones!

Evidence has been found for cats living with humans in China 5300 years ago – 3000 years earlier than pervious fossil evidence of domesticated cats in China.

Older archeological evidence for cats living with humans includes a cats buried with humans in Cyprus 9500 years ago and in Egypt 5500 years ago. Until DNA tests are done on the bones that were found in China we don’t know whether the species of cat found was related to Near Eastern wild cats thought to be the ancestors of domestic cats or whether they were descended from a different feline species. If cats moved east along the Silk Road where trade mingled East and West they moved all the way to China much earlier than had been thought.
Many of the medications we use for pets are actually drugs that were developed for use in people, not cats or dogs. Only 20% of the medications we use in cats have been FDA tested and approved for use in felines and virtually no drugs are tested for use in cage pets, birds or exotic species. In order to treat disease in these species we often need to use products that work for them but that don’t exist in a veterinary product.

Human medications often are too large for smaller patients or aren’t in a form that is useful for us. A 10 mg tablet made for people might contain 20 times the amount of drug that is safe for a cat and 100 times more than a parakeet could tolerate. There certainly are not tuna or chicken flavored liquid meds for people like we need for cats! Many liquid medications made for people come in flavors that don’t taste good to pets or contain Xylitol as a sweetener, which is very toxic to pets.

Another common scenario is a human medication that caused side effects in people and was pulled from the market, yet dogs or cats did well on it and we want them to continue to use it in pets. The veterinary market is small compared to the human market so drug manufacturers often don’t have enough financial incentive to test or manufacture drugs just for pets.

Using a medication in a species or for a purpose it was not intended for is called “off-label” use. By necessity, this is another thing we are often forced to do. For example, although meloxicam suspension is labeled for treating acute pain in cats it has not been tested or approved for long term use. In fact, there is no medication that has been tested for chronic pain in cats. We are faced with the choice of either letting the cat be in pain or using a drug that has never been tested for side effects with long term use. We use a human drug called gabapentin a lot for arthritis in cats. It has never undergone testing for cats but for long term treatment of arthritis it is probably safer than meloxicam. So, our choices are to use a drug approved for a different purpose that could cause stomach ulcers when used long term (the meloxicam) or a drug that should theoretically be safer but has never undergone any testing at all in cats and that doesn’t come in a size that is appropriate for them (the gabapentin). Sometimes we are stuck between a rock and a hard place!

To fill these gaps between what is approved and what is actually needed, we use compounding pharmacies. These pharmacies use human or raw powdered forms of drugs to make sizes, textures and flavors for pets that are called “compoundeds” or “formulated” drugs. We are fortunate to have a good veterinary compounding pharmacy in Glendale, The Pet Apothecary. Ye Olde Pharmacy in Cedarburg also makes some compounded medications. We use a few other specialized pharmacies when needed as well.

A “compounded drug” is a unique, custom made product that fills a prescription written by a doctor when there is no commercially available alternative.
anecdotal reports of possible side effects, plus educated guesses based on side effects seen in humans and the differing physiology of pets.

Here’s a judgment call example. Doxycycline has been used extensively in veterinary medicine, so we understand its risks and side effects. Doxy has recently become unavailable but we can get a similar drug called minocycline, made for humans. Minocycline has not been used in dogs until now because doxycycline was less expensive and readily available. Now our choices are to use minocycline without knowing for sure how safe it is in dogs or what dosage is best, or we can have doxycycline formulated. Which way do we go?

Along with compounding pharmacies, we have a few other good resources that help us to make good medication decisions. We have books called formularies that contain information on hundreds of drugs, both approved and unapproved, along with information on dosing, side effects and safety. Even without FDA studies done for dogs and cats we often know a lot about them, especially drugs that were tested on dogs before being tested on humans. We also have the Veterinary Information Network, or VIN, a huge on-line database, search engine and ask-the-expert forum where we can get answers to almost any question we can think of. Lastly, we have many specialists in the Milwaukee area we can consult with when we have questions about specific patients and medications.

No medication works if you aren’t able to get it into your pet. We are always willing to help find alternatives whenever you need them, whether it’s for flavored or liquid medications, a discontinued or unavailable medication or one made especially for a bird or pocket pet.

### SENIOR PET HEALTH MONTH

**SEPTEMBER IS SENIOR PET HEALTH MONTH** so I always try to include at least one senior topic in our fall newsletter. Although pets, like humans, can get cancer at any age, older pets are very prone to all different types of tumors. Most pet owners don’t really want to think about their pets getting cancer but the chances are pretty good that you will eventually see it in a pet that you love. The more you know what to watch for and the more screening tests you let us do the more likely we will catch it early, at a treatable stage. The earlier we find and treat cancer the better off that pet will be.

Once seen as an automatic death sentence, many types of cancer are becoming very treatable in both humans and animals. As with many diseases, earlier diagnosis leads to a better prognosis and lower cost of treatment, so we want you to be aware of what to watch for and what will happen if we find it in your cat or dog.

Many clients are surprised when we tell them there isn’t a blood test to diagnose their pet’s cancer or that their pet has cancer when the screening blood tests we did were normal. There are only a small number of cancers that are detectable with blood testing, and a few others that cause changes in blood parameters that can also be affected by other diseases. I’m not sure where the misperception comes from that screening blood tests diagnose cancer – there aren’t many human cancers detected that way either. Blood tests may suggest cancer but further testing is almost always needed to know for sure.

For example, an elevated calcium level is common in older cats. An elevated calcium level can be caused by cancer but also by kidney disease and disorders of the parathyroid gland that regulates calcium and phosphorus levels. If we note an elevated calcium level further testing will be needed to figure out what is causing it.

Most cancers are diagnosed by getting a sample of cells from the tumor or cancerous tissue and examining them under a microscope. If a lump is located inside the body it can be difficult to know it’s there and also to obtain cells from it. Ultrasound, CT and MRI scans are all used to try to locate cancers inside the chest, abdomen, brain or spine, and sometimes to guide a needle into the abnormal tissue. Whenever we suck (or aspirate) cells up from a lump with a small needle it’s called a fine needle aspirate. Looking at cells under a microscope is called cytology, meaning the study of cells.

About half of cancers are cured by surgically removing the lump. When we are lucky enough to be able to see a tumor on the outside of the body, or to palpate it when it’s inside the abdomen, we are way ahead. Surgery is usually the first treatment we recommend. Where surgery isn’t practical or possible, chemotherapy or radiation is used instead, when possible. If cancer cells have already escaped from the original tumor into the bloodstream or lymph system, then follow up chemotherapy or radiation may be needed after surgery.

Some chemotherapy protocols are expensive, prolonged and hard on the patient – but not all of them. One of my own cats has been on a simple chemotherapy protocol for intestinal lymphoma for three years now. She gets one pill 3 times a week and another twice a week and that’s it, other than regular blood screening twice a year to make sure she is tolerating them OK. Many cancers in dogs and cats are treated with an IV injection every three weeks for 4-6 treatments, another simple and well-tolerated protocol. Pets rarely lose hair or vomit after treatment.

*The bottom line is that cancer is not a death sentence most of the time. It should be addressed and treated like any other chronic disease. Kidney disease, heart disease, diabetes and allergies aren’t curable but we treat them and see years of increased life expectancy when we do. Cancer shouldn’t be any different.*
APOQUEL, our new wonder drug for allergies, remains in very short supply. Zoetis (formerly Pfizer Animal Health until it was spun off into a separate company) is building three new factories to manufacture the drug but they won’t be up and running until at least January. By next year’s allergy season we should have it in stock but for this year we are still unable to keep more than a few dogs on it with the small amount we are allocated every 60 days.

Along with Nexgard, the new once a month flea and tick pill, we now also have BRAVECTO. Bravecto contains almost the same medication as Nexgard but in a larger quantity, so it lasts 3 months instead of 1. The cost of 3 months of medication is similar for both. Which one you use will depend on whether it’s easier for you to remember to give it along with heartworm preventative every month or whether you’d rather give it less often. Bravecto will be great for hunting dogs with high tick risk during certain seasons of the year – a dose in September would last through fall hunting season. Certifect, our favorite topical tick preventative, has been taken off the market, though we still have some in stock. FRONTLINE PLUS is still a good product for routine use but if your dog has high tick risk consider Nexgard or Bravecto, instead of or in addition to Frontline, for even greater protection.

PACLITAXEL is a chemotherapy drug used frequently for a wide variety of cancers in humans. Human formulations of the drug use solvents that are not well tolerated by dogs – 64% of dogs had allergic reactions to it in one study. The FDA has recently approved a new formulation of paclitaxol just for dogs so the drug can now be used safely by veterinary oncologists to treat mammary (breast) cancer and squamous cell carcinoma. Studies are underway to see if it also could be used for lymphoma, histiocytic sarcoma and high-grade mast cell tumor. Although cancer still remains a dreaded diagnosis, better treatments are coming out on a regular basis, turning many types of cancer into treatable problems.