

Insider's Guide to Finding the Right Veterinarian

Ghostwritten for pet info website

Maybe you've just brought a puppy or kitten home and you need to find a veterinarian to advise you of the necessary vaccines and other health care they need. Or perhaps you're a seasoned owner of an older pet who has chronic health issues that require monitoring and medications who just moved to a new city or town. Looking for a veterinarian is one of those things, like finding a doctor, dentist, or auto mechanic, which few people like but that everyone must do sooner or later. If you own a pet, you will one day be looking for a veterinarian. Your current vet may retire, you may move, or you may just not be satisfied with your current veterinary practice.

You can find general articles all over the internet about finding a veterinarian. Most of these articles will tell you things like:

- ask someone you know
- visit the office
- compare prices
- find a vet before you need one

This is all good advice as far as it goes, but there is a lot more you can do to make sure you're getting the best veterinary care you can.

Cost and Trust

Here's a simple fact about veterinary care: it isn't cheap. The reason for this is that many of the same techniques and technologies used in human medicine have found their way into veterinary medicine. For example, ultrasound and EKG testing are now commonplace in veterinary medicine. Veterinary dentistry, surgery, cardiology, orthopedics, dermatology, ophthalmology, and pain control have all developed rapidly in the past 20 years. But all of these treatment options come at a price, and since most people don't know the finer points of medical treatment for their animals, they can't help but wonder whether they can trust their veterinarian or whether he or she is recommending unnecessary testing and treatment to increase the profit margin of their practice.

As a pet owner, you should take some time to consider in advance what treatment options you are comfortable with and what you won't do. Consider your pet's age, current level of health, and temperament. Will you put your 14-year-old dog through surgery, rehabilitation, and chemotherapy in order to add a year to his life? Six months? Your veterinarian can offer his or her advice or thoughts, but in the end it's a decision only you can make. On the other hand, don't skimp on simple diagnostic testing like blood work and x-rays that can provide a definitive answer to what's wrong with your pet and how to treat it.

Visiting the Office

Most articles on finding a good vet are going to recommend that you visit the vet's office in advance in order to see what it's like. Most veterinary hospitals are happy to give you a tour, and you should expect to see a facility that is clean and neat, with no objectionable odors. You can also find out some general things such as:

- What type of x-rays are used? If the hospital doesn't have digital x-ray, it's a sign that they either can't afford it (not good) or that they don't keep up with technology (also not good).
- What is the surgery suite like? How many surgery and dental tables do they have? Having more than one means they are more able to accommodate emergencies and that they perform a lot of procedures (good).
- Who monitors your animal under anesthesia? Will there be a dedicated staff member whose job it is to monitor your pet's vital signs and alert the doctor to any problems?
- What kind of anesthetic drugs do they use? There are a lot of anesthetic agents out there, but not every drug is suitable for every animal. Find out what the protocols are for your particular pet or breed.
- Do they have an oxygen cage? It's needed for animals that are having breathing difficulties due to heart disease, fluid in the abdomen, and other conditions.

When assessing things like anesthetic drugs and pain management, keep in mind that in a multi-doctor practice, there may be certain protocols, but often it is up to the individual doctor what drugs to use and when.

All of this is good information you can get at your tour visit, but a lot more valuable information will be available at your first appointment.

Your First Appointment

At your first appointment with your pet you will get a closer look at how your potential hospital operates. If it is a multi-doctor hospital you will probably be randomly assigned to a doctor unless you have a recommendation for a specific one. This is your chance to find out the practice style of the individual vet and see how well it meshes with your ideas. Here are some things you'll want to watch:

- **Physical examination:** Your pet should receive a thorough examination from head to tail, regardless of the reason you are there. If your pet is there for a possible ear infection, the vet will need to look at the ear, but they should also look at the pet's eyes and ears, listen to the heart and lungs, check the paws and teeth, and palpate the abdomen thoroughly.
- **Diagnostics:** These should make sense or be explained to you thoroughly. Diagnostic testing is frequently all about ruling certain things out. When tests come back negative, the owner can feel like they paid for an unnecessary test if its reason hasn't been thoroughly explained.
- **Communication:** Not only of diagnostic testing, but also any recommended treatments, prescribed medications or needed surgeries should all be explained to you by the veterinarian or the technician.

Speaking of technicians and other hospital staff, observe how they interact with your pet. These are the people who will be carrying out most of the doctor's treatments and testing, so watch to see how they handle your pet. This doesn't mean that they won't firmly restrain your pet in order to perform their jobs safely, but it does mean they'll do so with respect. The staff should radiate a genuine love for animals and for their jobs.

Your relationship with your veterinarian is one that takes time to develop. You cannot completely trust someone overnight. But if you do some research, communicate your needs and expectations, and observe whenever you are interacting with them, you will find the right veterinarian for you and your pet.

