HOW I TREAT...HOT VETERINARY TOPICS AND PET TRENDS FOR 2019

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Let's take a look at some of the hot veterinary topics and pet trends for 2018 and 2019.

2018 and 2019 will kick off and be consumed by discussions around veterinary telemedicine and telehealth. In January 2018, the AVMA will convene in Chicago to discuss what constitutes a veterinary client patient relationship or VCPR and how will that affect telemedicine moving forward. You can bet we're going to hear a lot about apps and programs and websites that provide veterinary care throughout the year.

Student debt may be one of the drivers for telemedicine. As veterinarians seek alternative ways to make income we've talked about the student debt crisis on this channel before and I've conveyed my concerns about how student debt may actually delay future retirement of veterinarian's thus creating imbalances between veterinary supply and demand. You can bet that we'll be talking about veterinary student debt throughout 2019 and beyond.

We'll also be talking about changes with veterinary professionals. We can't forget that 2018 and 2019 will be the year that the United States Veterinary Nurse Initiative (VNI) will really come to the forefront. Not only is this change in nomenclature from veterinary technician to veterinary nurse important but also it serves to show the expanding role of veterinary technicians within our profession. Expect to hear a lot more about the VNI in 2019.

Practice owners will continue to discuss the cost of veterinary care and ways to provide more affordable access to veterinary services. Pet Insurance wellness plans and monthly payment options will dominate the conversation around cost of care.

In addition, the veterinary profession needs to examine the expansion of veterinary services provided by nonprofits and animal shelters and how that potentially affects the profession moving forward. The rising cost of veterinary care will be an important discussion to have.

In 2018, Americans will spend over 27 billion dollars on pet food. In 2019, we're going to see advances in raw diets freeze dried diets. We're going to see innovations in food distribution. We're going to see home prepared meals continue to skyrocket as well as restaurants style foods for your pets being delivered on your front doorstep. 2019 will serve up a buffet of new pet food options for pet owners pet owners will also have many questions around human great pet food ingredients and how are pet foods manufactured distributed and where are ingredients being sourced.

We also have to talk about environmental advocacy as veterinarians in 2019 and beyond. Veterinarians need to have more open discussions about the impact that animals have on our environment and our planet. Sustainable farming techniques and the humane treatment of livestock need to be talked about more openly in the veterinary profession. Pet owners and animal advocates are looking to veterinarians for guidance on these topics and we need to deliver.

The U.S. opioid epidemic will impact the veterinary profession in 2018 and 2019. In our weekly podcast the Veterinary Viewfinder, we tackled this topic over a year ago and I must admit I've been a little bit disappointed in the profession's response to the opioid crisis. Instead of seeking ways to collaborate with medical healthcare professionals on ways to combat the opioid epidemic the veterinary profession seems...
to have wanted to distance itself and separate us from the reporting measures and acted by Congress and state medical boards. My belief is that if we want to be taken seriously as healthcare professionals, this is part of our responsibility. Responsible use of opioids is a professional obligation and one I take very seriously. I think we need to have more open discussions on how we as veterinary professionals can help in this crisis.

If we're talking about drugs, 2019 will also be the year that pet owners ask for more cannabinoid treatments for their pets. 29 U.S. states now allow the medical usage of marijuana and eight states allow recreational use of marijuana. All of this leads to a lot of questions: How can this help my dog or cat who's dealing with a medical condition? It's time the veterinary profession takes this issue seriously begins to conduct research where appropriate and have answers for the pet owning public.

Another area that pet owners are looking for answers about in 2019 is around alternative and complimentary veterinary medicine. With mounting evidence supporting the use of things such as Class 4 laser therapy, acupuncture, omega 3 fatty acids, and other supplements, rehabilitation, attritional counseling, and weight loss. Veterinarians need to embrace these complementary modalities and make it a part of their everyday practice in 2018.

The business world will be buzzing with terms such as artificial intelligence, synthetic intelligence, chat bots, and more. Throughout 2019, I fully expect that by the end of this year, most veterinary clinics will be able to employ some level of artificial intelligence on their social media, their business websites, or even on their telephone.

As we talk about advances in technology, I also need to mention something that I call “pet care by app.” Younger pet owners are turning to their smartphones to assist them in the daily care of their dogs and cats. Apps like Rover, Pet Coach by Petco, Dog Vacay, and Wag will continue to gain momentum and the pet care space. You'll also see these types of apps be integrated into smart dog bowls and water bowls. You'll see wearable activity monitors enhanced by synthetic intelligence. All of this adding up to “pet care by app” in 2019.

I'm also excited to see the advances in immunotherapy and targeted immunotherapy and cancer for the next several years. We've had a canine cancer vaccine against oral melanomas for a few years, but now we're seeing these technologies being exported from the human cancer world into the veterinary realm. With the recent approval of the canine autologous cancer vaccine or the Canine ACV against solid tumors like hemangioma sarcomas, and sarcomas, I expect to see more of these types of targeted therapies being used in veterinary medicine. 2019 may be the year that we start to turn the tide against pet (and human) cancer. I also expect to see advances in stem cell therapies and advances in novel antibiotics as veterinarians face increased antibiotic regulations. And 2019 will also be the year that pet DNA testing goes from simply “who's your daddy?” to realistic pet disease detection.

I'm incredibly excited about advances in DNA technologies and how we can use that to better identify risk factors for our patients. 2019 will mark the first time that we have more choices better products with higher precision and specificity than ever before. DNA technology holds the promise of completely transforming the way we view medicine.

These are just a few of the topics I think we'll be talking about in veterinary medicine in 2019 and beyond.